NARUTO
SHONENJUMP MANGA
Story & Art by
Masashi Kishimoto
volume 28

岸本斉史

Uh... Oh! Right! I wanted to let you all know that with this volume begins Part Two, so I look forward to your patronage. To those who have not yet read Part One, please read from volume 1. Then again, feel free to read it from the middle as well... (laughs).

—Masashi Kishimoto, 2005

Author/artist Masashi Kishimoto was born in 1974 in rural Okayama Prefecture, Japan. After spending time in art college, he won the Hop Step Award for new manga artists with his manga **Karakuri** (Mechanism). Kishimoto decided to base his next story on traditional Japanese culture. His first version of **Naruto**, drawn in 1997, was a one-shot story about fox spirits; his final version, which debuted in **Weekly Shonen Jump** in 1999, quickly became the most popular ninja manga in Japan.

NARUTO VOL. 28
SHONEN JUMP Manga Edition

This graphic novel contains material that was originally published in English in **SHONEN JUMP** #61–62. Artwork in the magazine may have been slightly altered from that presented here.

STORY AND ART BY MASASHI KISHIMOTO

Translation/Mari Morimoto
English Adaptation/Deric A. Hughes & Benjamin Raab
Touch-up Art & Lettering/Mark McMurray & Inori Fukuda Trant
Design/Sean Lee
Editor/Joel Enos

NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto. All rights reserved. First published in Japan in 1999 by SHUEISHA Inc., Tokyo. English translation rights arranged by SHUEISHA Inc.

Some artwork has been modified from the original Japanese edition.

The rights of the author(s) of the work(s) in this publication to be so identified have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The stories, characters and incidents mentioned in this publication are entirely fictional.

No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the copyright holders.

Printed in the U.S.A.

Published by VIZ Media, LLC
P.O. Box 77010
San Francisco, CA 94107

10 9 8 7 6 5 4
First printing, March 2008
Fourth printing, July 2012

www.viz.com

RATED T FOR TEEN
PARENTAL ADVISORY
NARUTO is rated T for Teen and is recommended for ages 13 and up. This volume contains realistic and fantasy violence.
ratings.viz.com

THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR MANGA
SHONEN JUMP
www.shonenjump.com

SHONEN JUMP MANGA EDITION

NARUTO

VOL. 28

HOMECOMING

STORY AND ART BY

MASASHI KISHIMOTO

The Story So Far...

Twelve years ago a destructive nine-tailed fox spirit attacked the ninja village of Konohagakure. The Hokage, or village champion, defeated the fox by sealing its soul into the body of a baby boy. Now that boy, Uzumaki Naruto, has grown up to be a ninja-in-training, learning the art of ninjutsu with his teammates Sakura and Sasuke. During the Second Chûnin Exam, Orochimaru, a former student of the Third Hokage, attacks Naruto and the others. He leaves a curse mark upon Sasuke and then vanishes.

During the Third Exam, Orochimaru and company return to launch *Operation Destroy Konoha*, a campaign that ends with the sacrifice of Lord Hokage's life. Following the fierce battle against Orochimaru and Kabuto, Lady Tsunade then becomes the Fifth Hokage.

In the wake of the battle, Konoha suffers yet another loss when Sasuke, tempted by Orochimaru's offer of power, leaves with the Sound Ninja Four. Desperate to save his friend, Naruto enters into a bitter fight with Sasuke, but is ultimately unable to stop him. Amid movement by both Orochimaru and the mysterious organization the Akatsuki, Naruto and the others begin further training!!

NARUTO

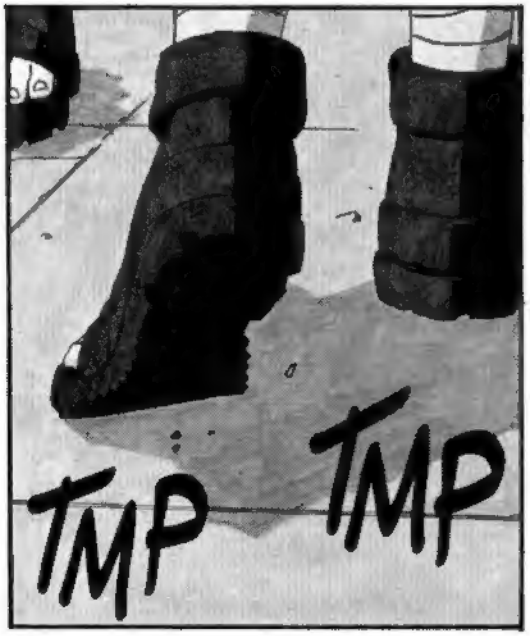
VOL. 28
HOMECOMING

CONTENTS

NUMBER 245: HOMECOMING!!	7
NUMBER 246: MY, HOW THEY'VE GROWN!!	29
NUMBER 247: INTRUDERS IN THE SAND	49
NUMBER 248: THE SAND STRIKE BACK...!!	69
NUMBER 249: THE KAZEKAGE STANDS TALL...!!	89
NUMBER 250: NEW SQUAD, FIRST MISSION!!	109
NUMBER 251: TO THE SAND...!!	129
NUMBER 252: FEELINGS RUN WILD...!!	149
NUMBER 253: REINFORCEMENTS...!!	169

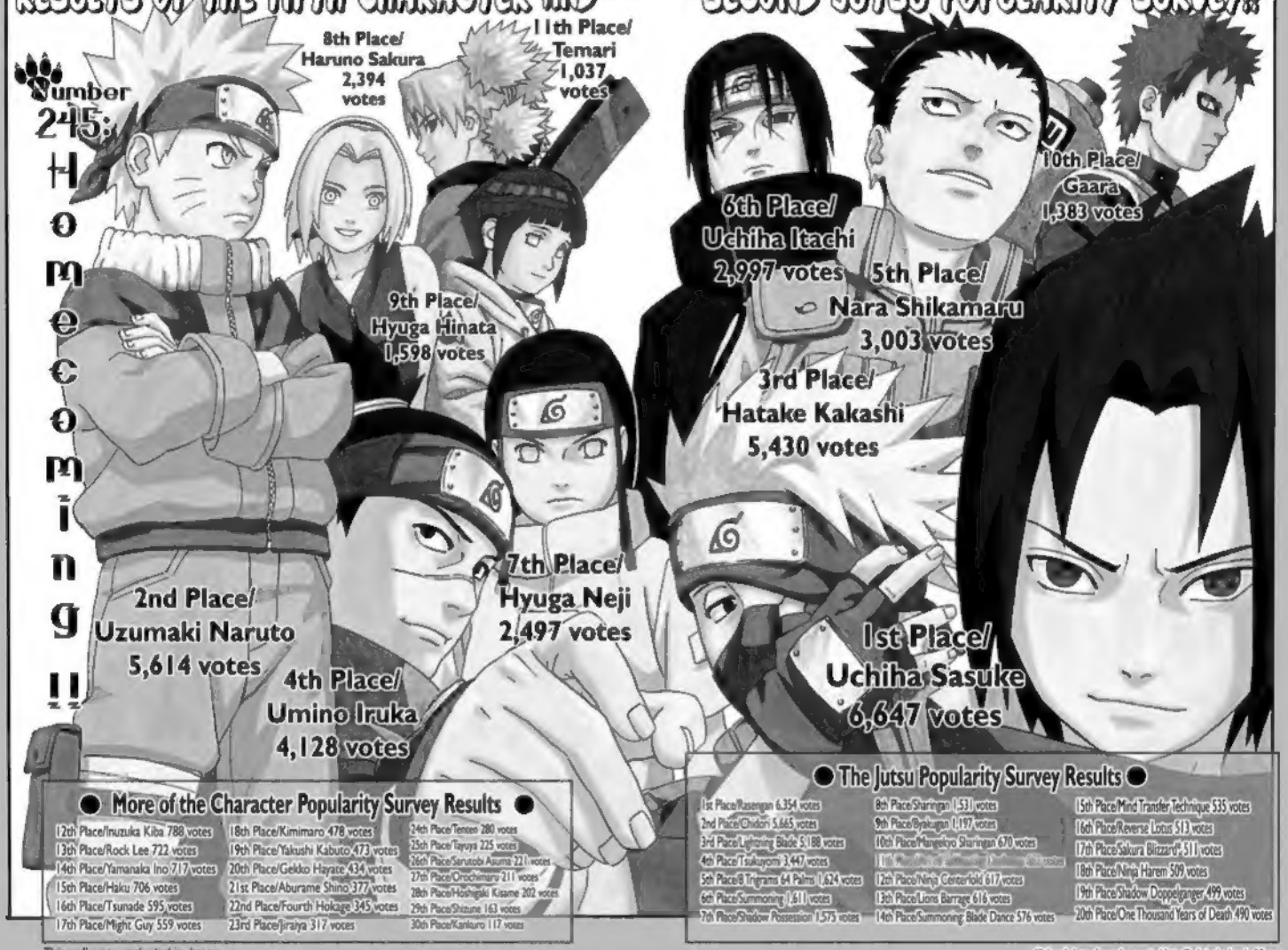
Number 245: Homecoming!!

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN TWO YEARS...
KRUNCH
SO IT HAS...


TMP
TMP

そば所

RESULTS OF THE FIFTH CHARACTER AND SECOND JUTSU POPULARITY SURVEY!!



● More of the Character Popularity Survey Results ●

12th Place/Inuzuka Kiba 788 votes
13th Place/Rock Lee 722 votes
14th Place/Yamanaka Ino 717 votes
15th Place/Haku 706 votes
16th Place/Tsunade 595 votes
17th Place/Might Guy 559 votes
18th Place/Kimimaro 478 votes
19th Place/Yakushi Kabuto 473 votes
20th Place/Gekko Hayate 434 votes
21st Place/Aburame Shino 377 votes
22nd Place/Fourth Hokage 345 votes
23rd Place/Jiraiya 317 votes
24th Place/Tenten 280 votes
25th Place/Tayuya 225 votes
26th Place/Sarutobi Asuma 221 votes
27th Place/Orochimaru 211 votes
28th Place/Hoshigaki Kisame 202 votes
29th Place/Shizune 163 votes
30th Place/Kankuro 117 votes

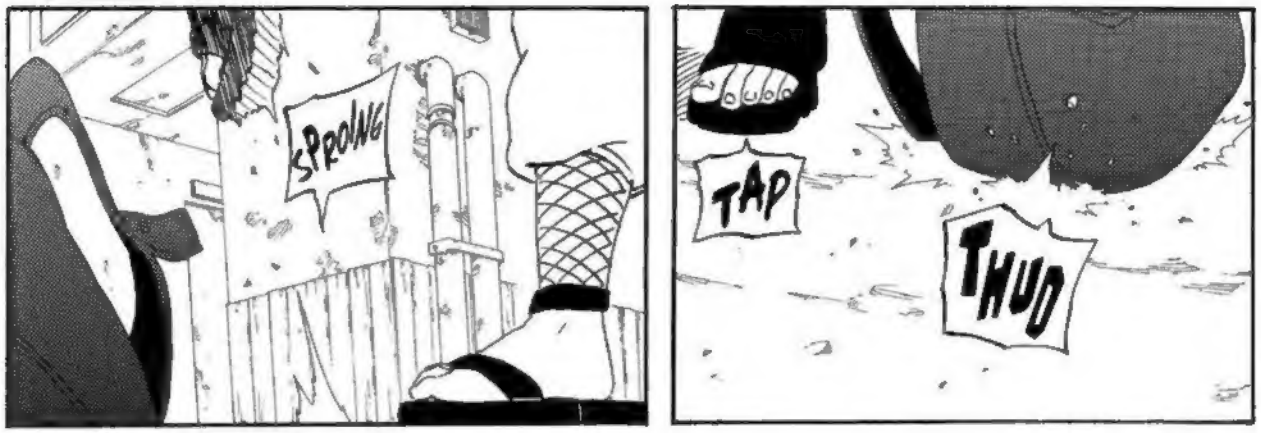
This poll was conducted in Japan.

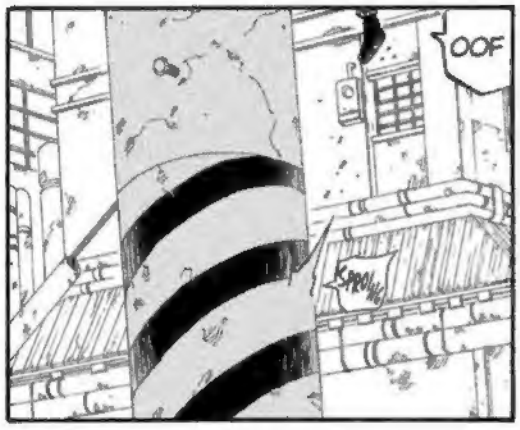
● The Jutsu Popularity Survey Results ●

1st Place/Rasengan 6,354 votes
2nd Place/Chidori 5,665 votes
3rd Place/Lightning Blade 5,188 votes
4th Place/Tsukuyomi 3,447 votes
5th Place/8 Trigrams 64 Palms 1,624 votes
6th Place/Summoning 1,611 votes
7th Place/Shadow Possession 1,575 votes
8th Place/Sharingan 1,531 votes
9th Place/Byakugan 1,197 votes
10th Place/Mangekyo Sharingan 670 votes
[illegible] votes
12th Place/Ninja Centerfold 617 votes
13th Place/Lions Barrage 616 votes
14th Place/Summoning: Blade Dance 576 votes
15th Place/Mind Transfer Technique 535 votes
16th Place/Reverse Lotus 513 votes
17th Place/Sakura Blizzard* 511 votes
18th Place/Ninja Harem 509 votes
19th Place/Shadow Doppelganger 499 votes
20th Place/One Thousand Years of Death 490 votes

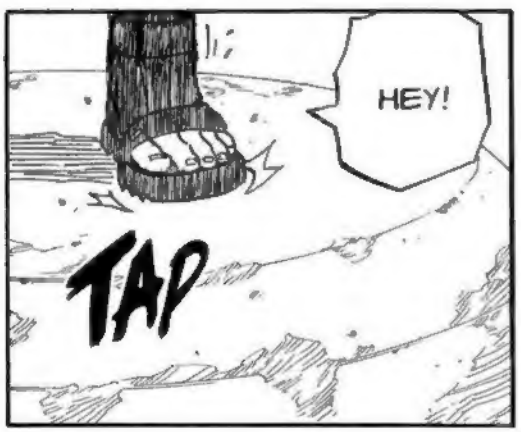
*Sakura's Jutsu from the movie *Ninja Clash in the Land of Snow*

NARUTO
-ナルト-

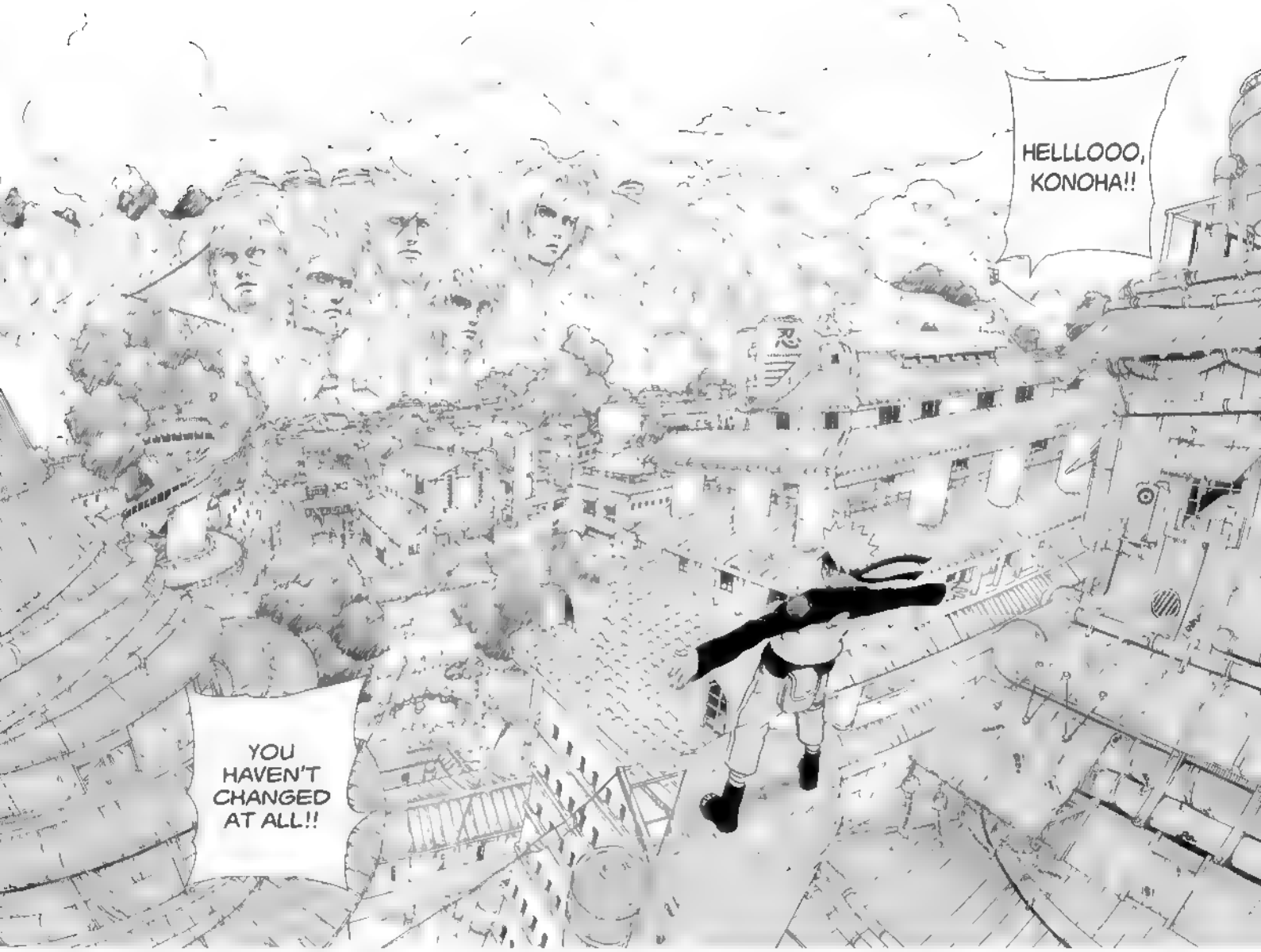

SPROING
TAP
THUD


OOF
SPROING

HEH...
ALWAYS RAMBUNC-TIOUS...


HEY!
TAP

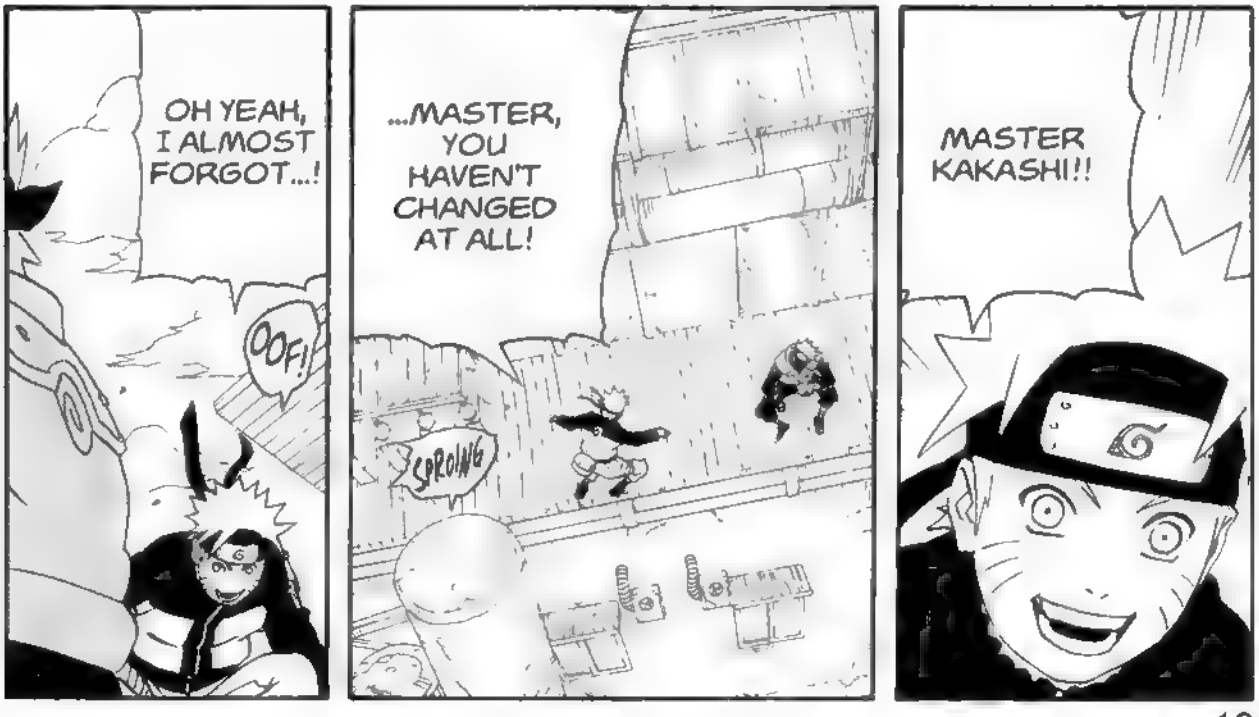
...


HELLLOOO, KONOHA!!
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL!!

YEAH!!

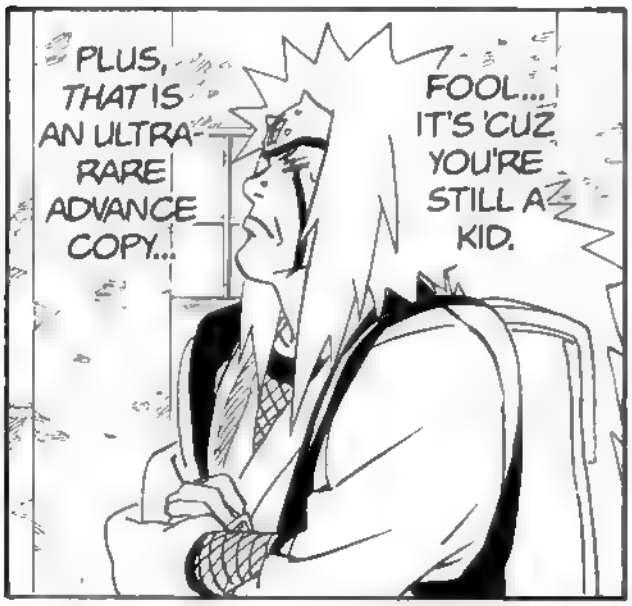
HUNH?!
ALL GROWN UP, EH, NARUTO?
HA HA HA!
GRANNY TSUNADE'S UP THERE NOW!
...!
!

YO!
MAKE-OUT VIOLENCE


OH YEAH, I ALMOST FORGOT...!
OOF!
...MASTER, YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL!
SPROING
MASTER KAKASHI!!

SAKURA...
I HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU!
SHLOOF
?
YES, MILADY?
KLAK KLAK
NARUTO... YOU...
WHAT?! NARUTO?!
...NARUTO HAS RE-TURNED!
THAT BRAT...

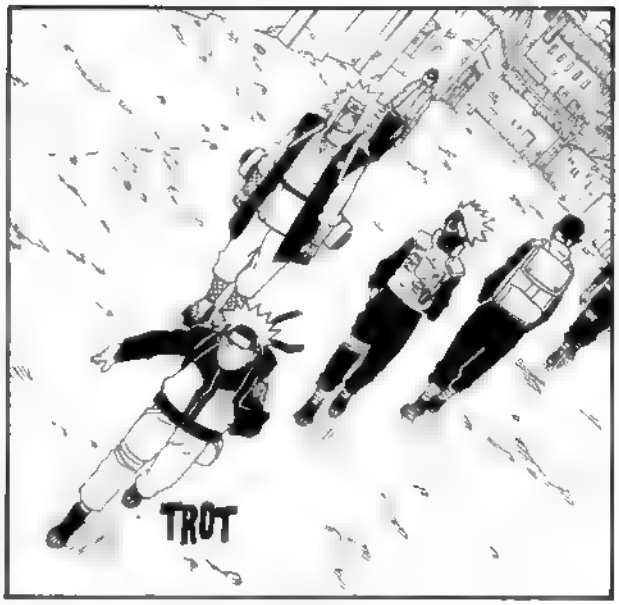
MAKE-OUT TACTICS
MAKE-OUT TACTICS


PLUS, THAT IS AN ULTRA-RARE ADVANCE COPY...
FOOL... IT'S 'CUZ YOU'RE STILL A KID.

THE FIRST IN THREE YEARS! FIGURED YOU'D LIKE IT, EVEN THOUGH IT'S PROBABLY TOTALLY BORING...
IT'S THE LATEST IN THE *MAKE-OUT* SERIES, Y'KNOW.

CHIRP
CHIRP

SHOW OF HANDS...
WHO WANTS ICHIRAKU RAMEN?!


TROT

AS PROMISED, KAKASHI...
...HE'S ALL YOURS.

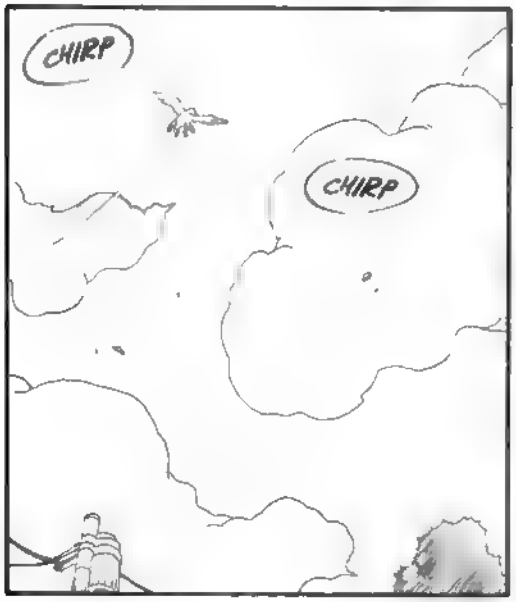
WHOA!!

...SO I'M GOING BACK TO GATHERING INTELLI-GENCE.
I SUSPECT THE AKATSUKI WILL MAKE THEIR NEXT MOVE SOON...

...
MAKE-OUT TACTICS

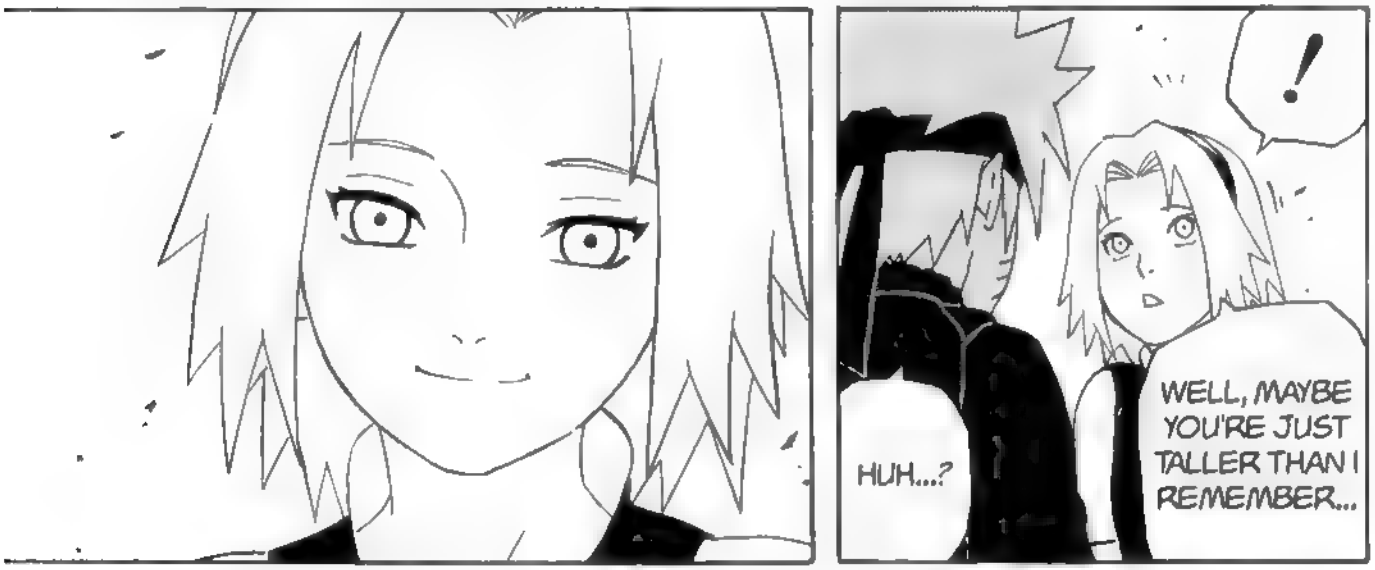
S...
SAKURA?

HUH?
NARUTO?!
!!


CHIRP
CHIRP

!

?
SMOOTH, KID...COULD YOU BE ANY MORE OBLIVIOUS?
GRIN
IF YOU SAY SO! YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL!
ALMOST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU. WE'VE BOTH REALLY GROWN, HUH?
WOW...


!
HUH...?
WELL, MAYBE YOU'RE JUST TALLER THAN I REMEMBER...

!
NARUTO BIG BRO! CHECK IT OUT!
...TALLER... AND... WELL...

...
!
...
WHOA !!
...

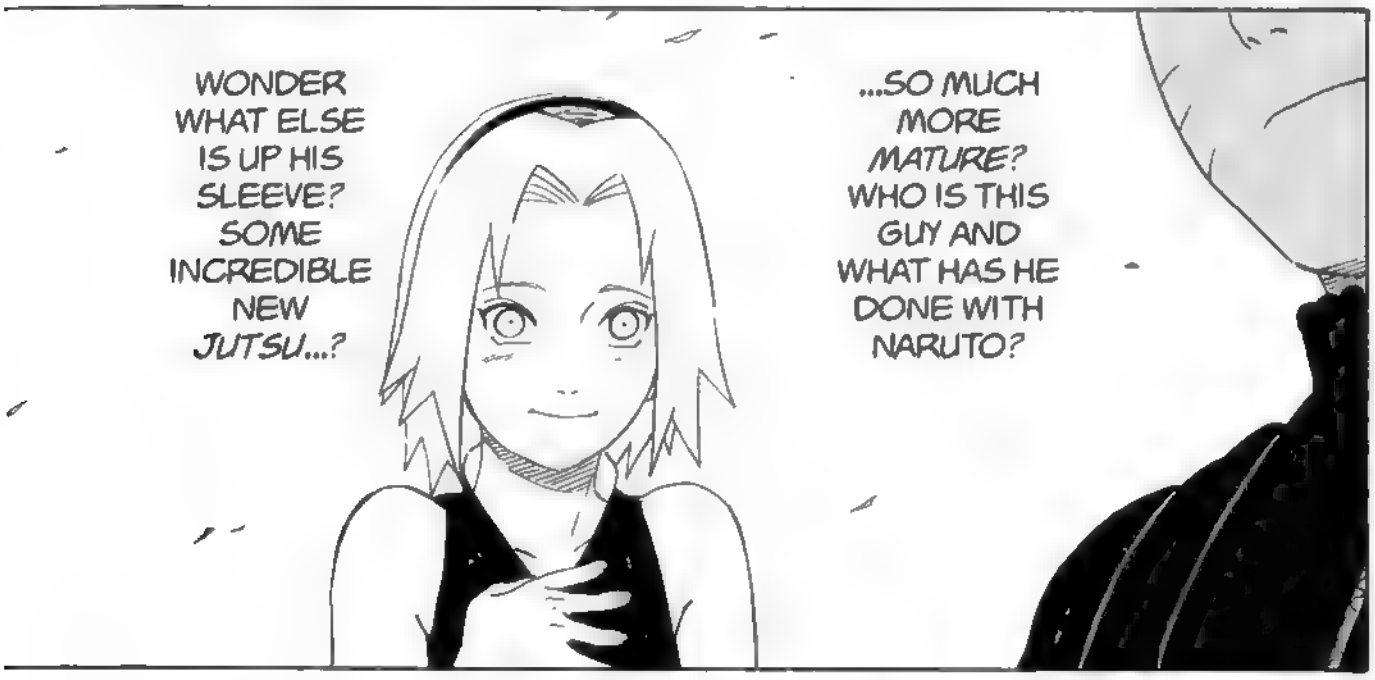
FOF F

NINJA CENTER-FOLD!!
FO OF

HEH HEH HEH...

I GOT THE *BOING-FWHHT-BOING* PART DOWN NOW, EH?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?!

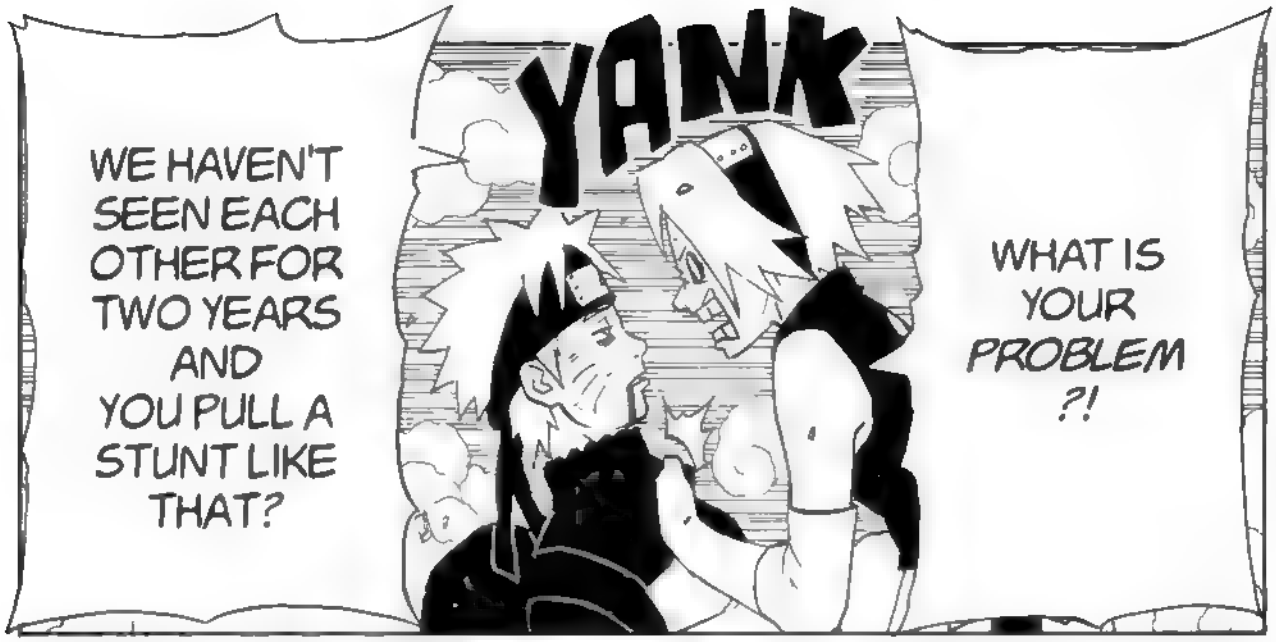
...
YOU GOTTA WORK ON OTHER JUTSU TOO, Y'KNOW.
KONOHAMARU, I'M NOT A KID ANYMORE.
!


WONDER WHAT ELSE IS UP HIS SLEEVE? SOME INCREDIBLE NEW JUTSU...?
...SO MUCH MORE MATURE? WHO IS THIS GUY AND WHAT HAS HE DONE WITH NARUTO?

NEW PERVY NINJUTSU ...?
NOW WATCH THIS! MY NEW PERVY NINJUTSU INVENTION!! HERE IT GOES!!
THAT JUTSU IS TOTALLY BORING, KONOHAMARU!

DRROOM
...ARE YOU KID-DING ME ?!?

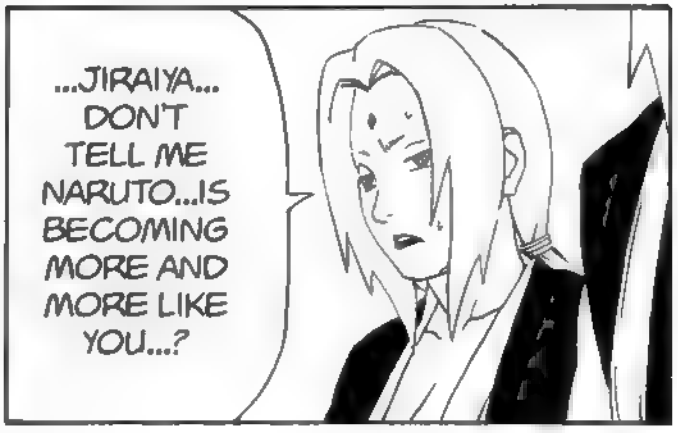
FWH OOSH
...
...
HUH?
...


WE HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER FOR TWO YEARS AND YOU PULL A STUNT LIKE THAT?
YANK
WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM ?!

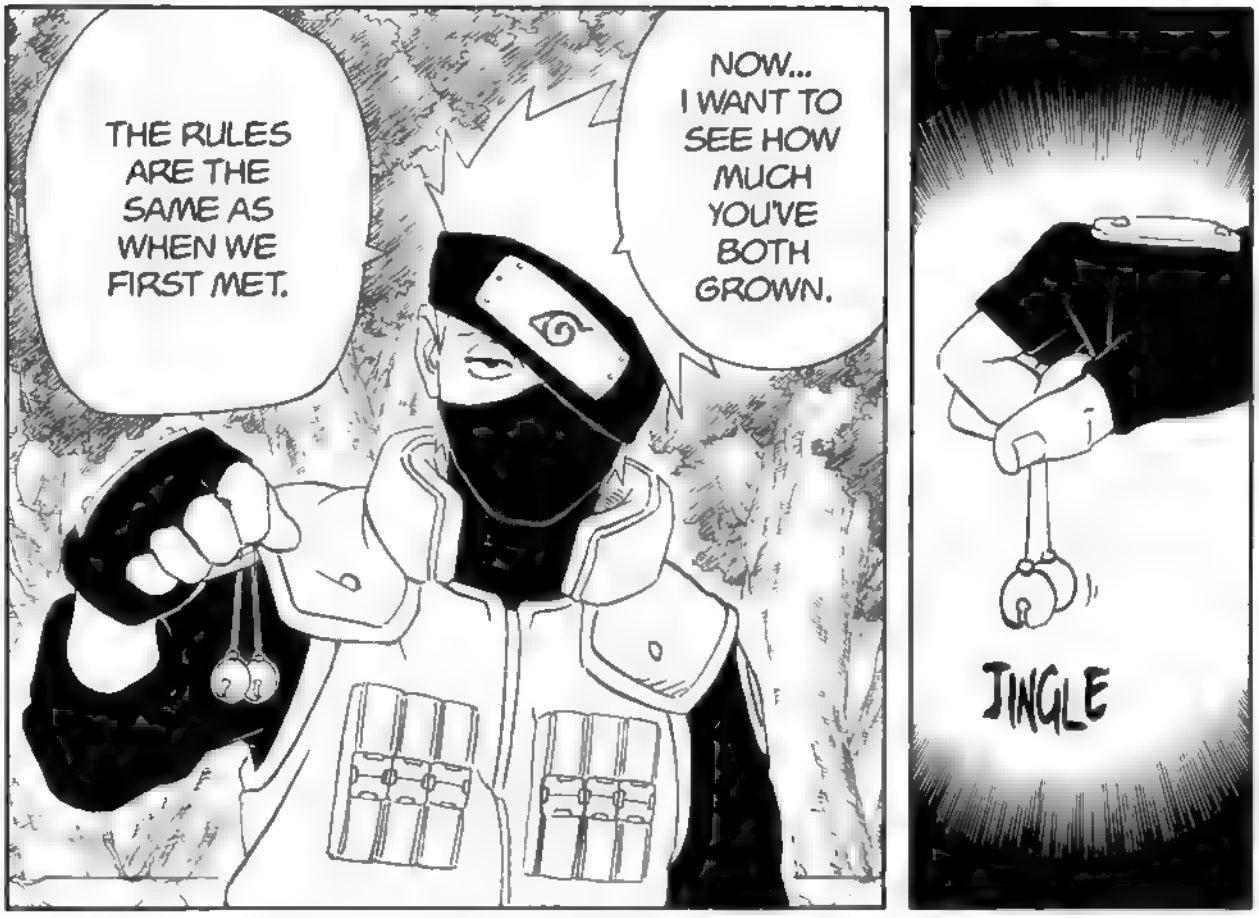
YOU'RE SCARING KONOHA-MARU...
NOW, NOW, SAKURA, CALM DOWN...

AND I WAS THINKING YOU WERE SO GROWN UP!
DO YOU ?!?
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW THAT MAKES ME FEEL?! HUH?!
SHOOKA SHOOKA

...YOU'VE RAISED YOUR OWN TSUNADE JUNIOR, TOO...!
油
THAT HOT, QUICK TEMPER AND MONSTER STRENGTH ...


...JIRAIYA... DON'T TELL ME NARUTO...IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE LIKE YOU...?

CLOMP
KAKASHI.
...ALL RIGHT!
ENOUGH WITH THE EMOTIONAL REUNION.
...!
WOW, IT SURE HAS BEEN A WHILE.
FELLOW KONOHA SHINOBI.
NOT AS SENSEI AND STUDENTS. BUT AS EQUALS.
...ARE GOING TO BE PART OF MY TEAM AGAIN.
FROM HERE ON OUT, YOU TWO...


THE RULES ARE THE SAME AS WHEN WE FIRST MET.
NOW... I WANT TO SEE HOW MUCH YOU'VE BOTH GROWN.
JINGLE

ATTACK AS THOUGH YOU MEAN TO KILL OR YOU'LL NEVER STAND A CHANCE!

MEET MASASHI KISHIMOTO'S ASSISTANTS, PART 9
ASSISTANT NO. 9 MURAKAMI MASAKI

NARU

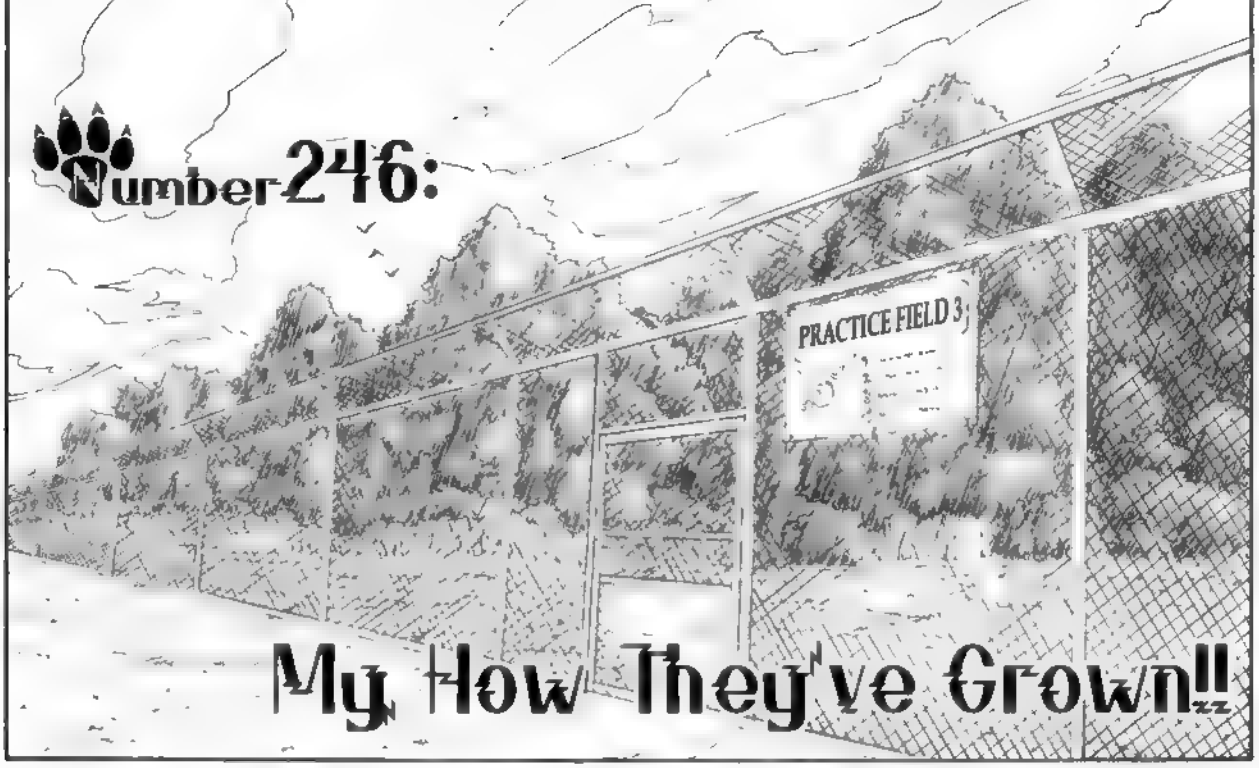
PROFILE

- FROM FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE IN THE TÔHOKU, OR NORTHEAST REGION. THEREFORE HAS A TÔHOKU ACCENT. (MAY BE OBVIOUS, BUT IS A FRESH SOUND IN THE OFFICE.)
- HAS PUFFY CHEEKS. MAKES ONE WANT TO POKE THEM!
- FAMILY MAKES SELF-DEFENSE FORCE ISSUE PARACHUTES AND LANDING MATS FOR JUMPING FROM HIGH PLACES SUCH AS OUT OF TALL BUILDINGS. THUS, HAS BEEN USED AS A TEST SUBJECT BY HIS FATHER IN PRODUCT TRIALS.
- QUITE A ROMANTIC. "IT'S LOVE," HE'S FOND OF SAYING. (WITH A TÔHOKU ACCENT, OF COURSE.)
- VERY SOCIABLE AND WELL-MANNERED, OBVIOUSLY RAISED WELL BY HIS PARENTS. (ALTHOUGH HE WAS USED AS A TEST SUBJECT...)
- GENTLE AND KIND, A VERY RARE SPECIMEN NOWADAYS.
- UNLIKE HIS CONTEMPORARY, ASSISTANT NO. 8 ITAKURA YÛICHI, CAN KEEP UP WITH GUNDAM CHAT. (AND IS QUITE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT A MYRIAD OF OTHER THINGS AS WELL.)

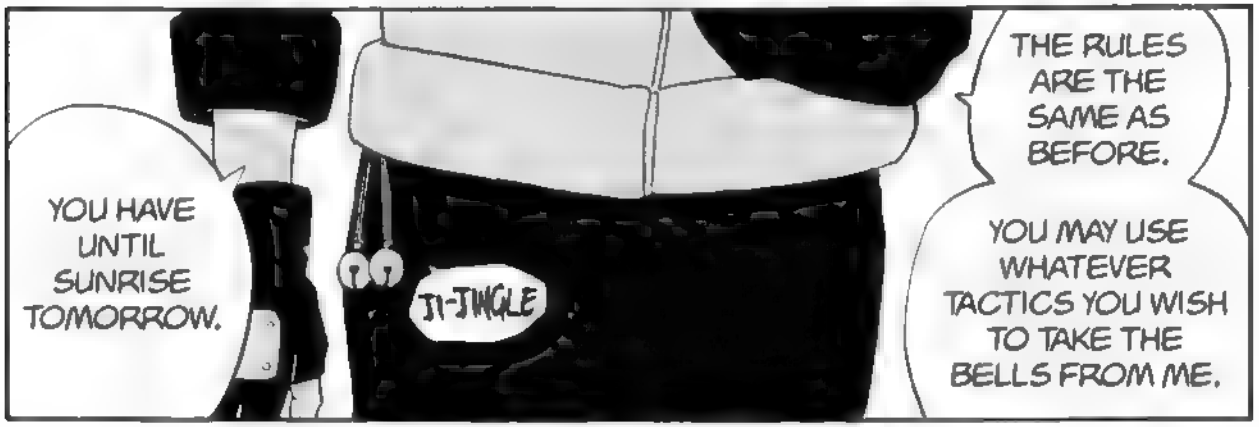
2005.5.6

村上正樹

Number 246:



My, How They've Grown!!



CELL NUMBER SEVEN...
THIS WAS THE SITE OF YOUR VERY FIRST EXERCISE.
OH, RIGHT.
MAKE-OUT TACTICS
THE THREE-MAN CELL...
...WE HAD SASUKE, TOO, DIDN'T WE...
...BACK THEN...
...!
...
...

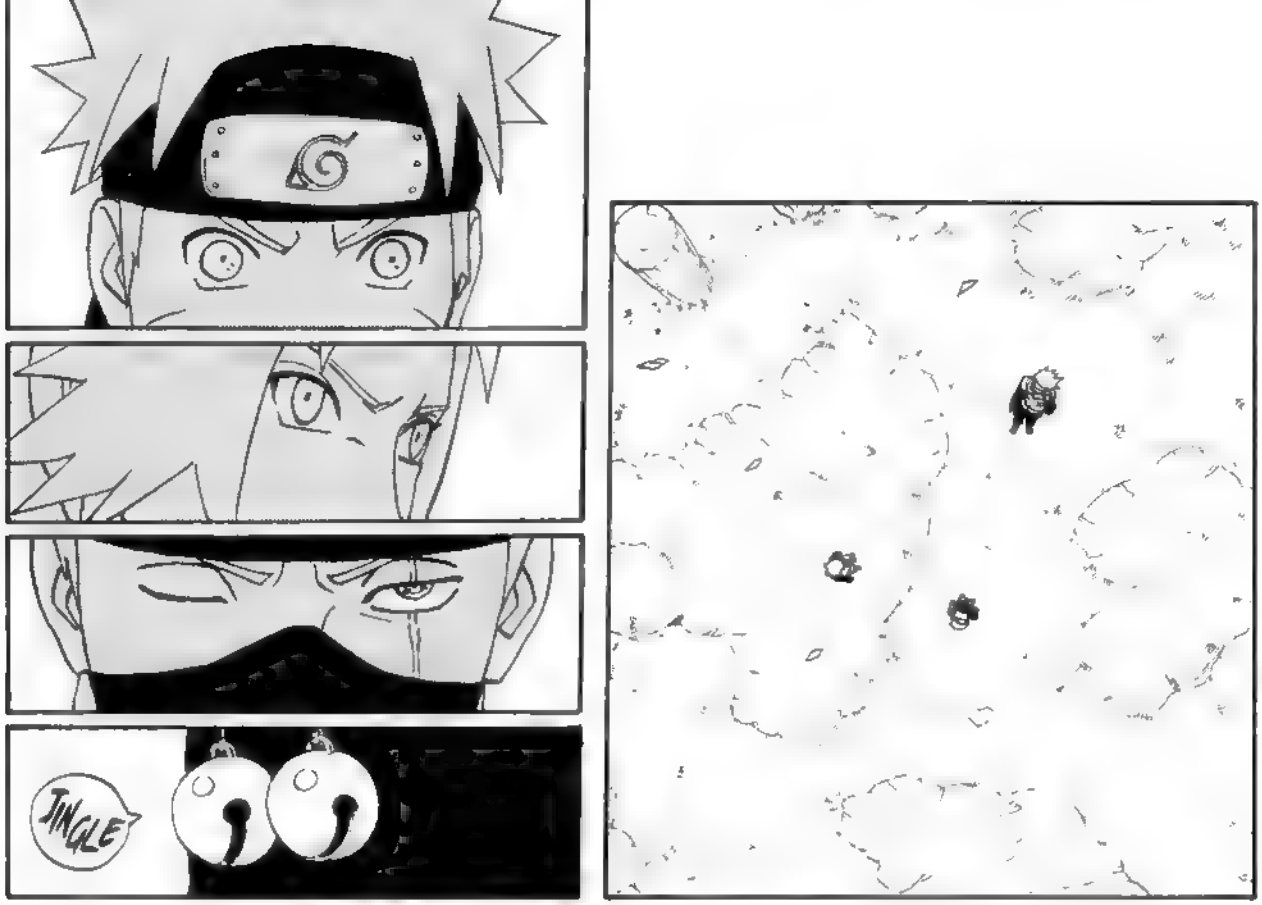
DOOM
MUTTER MUTTER
...
MUTTER MUTTER

CLOMP
!

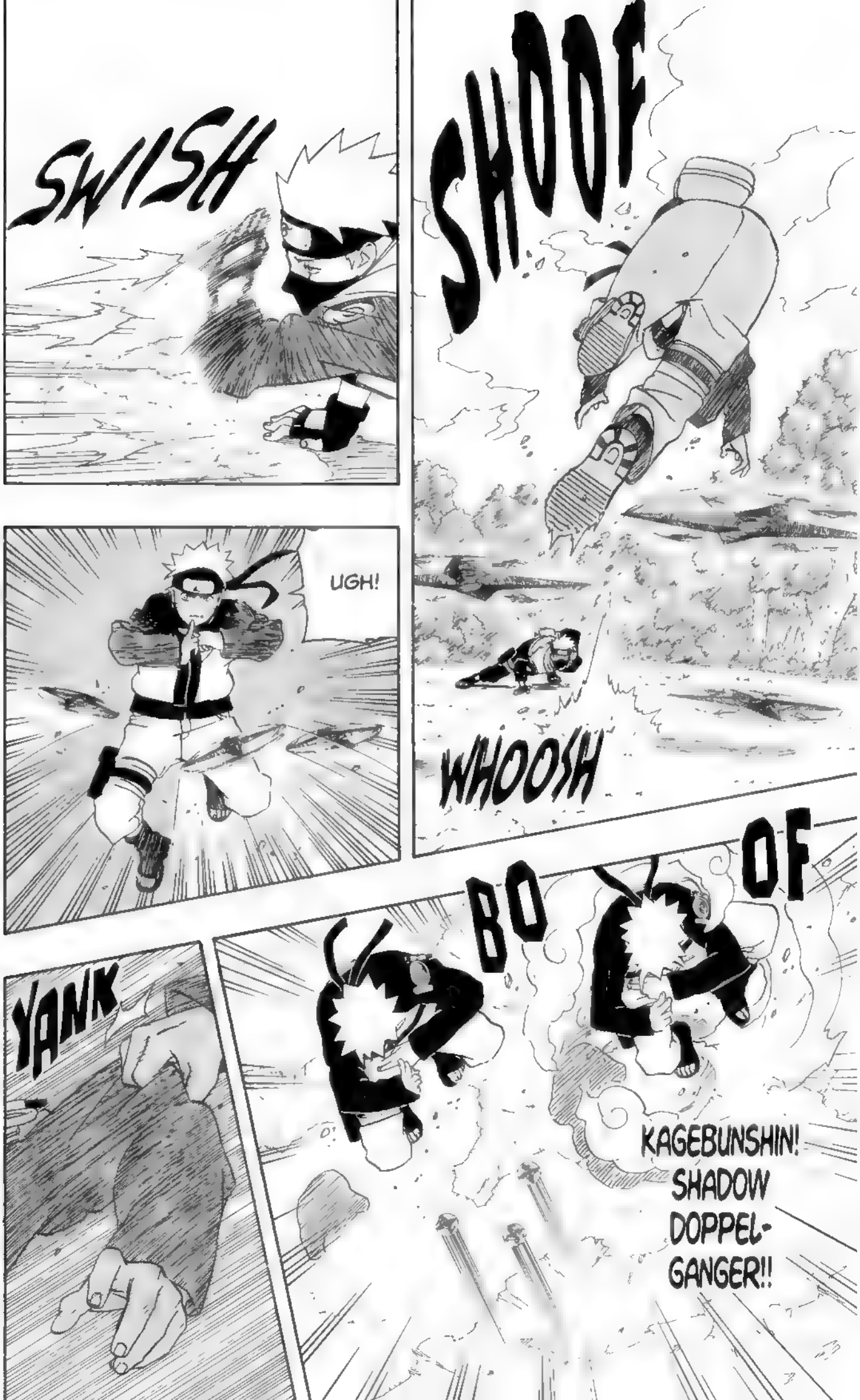
I GUESS SASUKE'S NAME IS TABOO...

MAKE-OUT TACTICS
MAKE-OUT TACTICS
ANYWAY...
...LET'S BEGIN...

OR HAVE YOU FINISHED IT ALREADY?
KRIK
CINCH
HEH HEH, NOT GONNA READ THIS TIME...
...MASTER KAKASHI?
TAP.
BESIDES, I GET THE FEELING THAT...
RUSTLE
NOPE... JUST SAVING IT FOR LATER.
...THIS TIME I'M GOING TO HAVE TO...
TUG
... MAKE MORE OF A SERIOUS EFFORT.

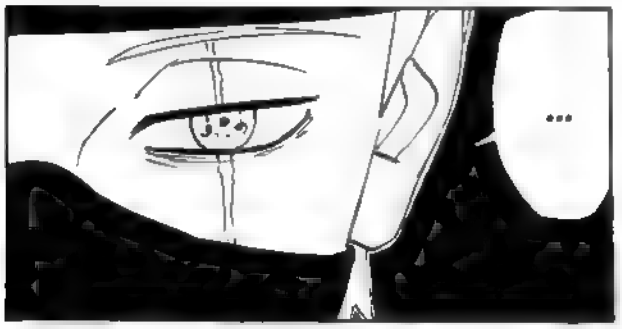

JINGLE

WHOOSH
SHMP
WHIP


SWISH
SHOOF
UGH!
WHOOSH
YANK
BO OF
KAGEBUNSHIN! SHADOW DOPPEL-GANGER!!

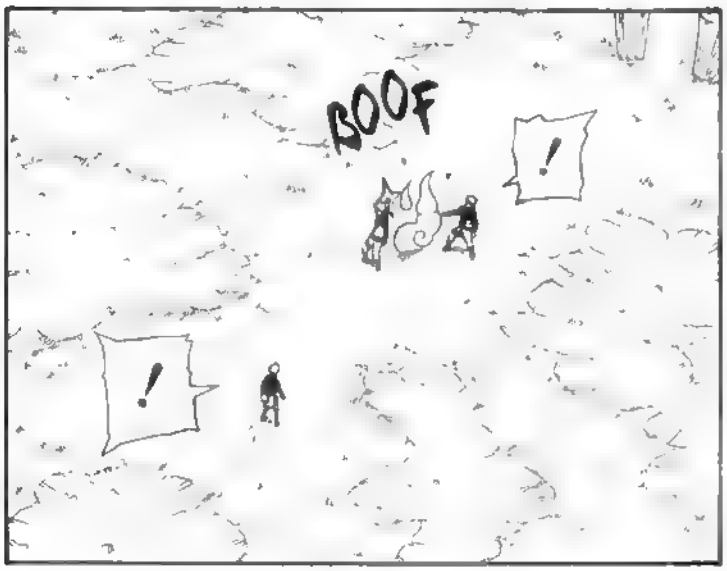
WHOOSH
BO-OF
THOCK THOCK
SCREEEEECH
TRANSFOR-MATION!!
HE USED A SHADOW DOPPEL-GANGER TO HELP MANEUVER IN MIDAIR!
NICE...!
FWHP
SNAG
SHF

HEH... STILL THE IMPATIENT ONE, EH...
HIS USE OF SHADOW DOPPEL-GANGERS...AND HIS TIMING... THEY'VE BOTH IMPROVED.


...

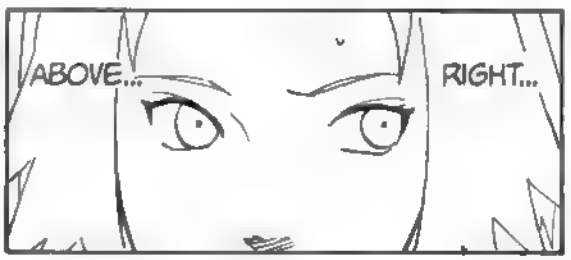
HEH HEH...

I DIDN'T SAY, "GO."
NOT SO FAST.


BOOF
!
!

YOU REALLY HAVE MATURED, NARUTO...
ALL RIGHT, GO!

BELOW!!
NO SIGN OF HIM ANY-WHERE... SO...
REAR


ABOVE...
RIGHT...

BEHIND...
LEFT...

WHAT?!
LOOKS LIKE MEDICAL NINJUTSU WASN'T ALL TSUNADE TAUGHT YOU, SAKURA...
WHAT RAW POWER!
!!
PEEK-A-BOO!

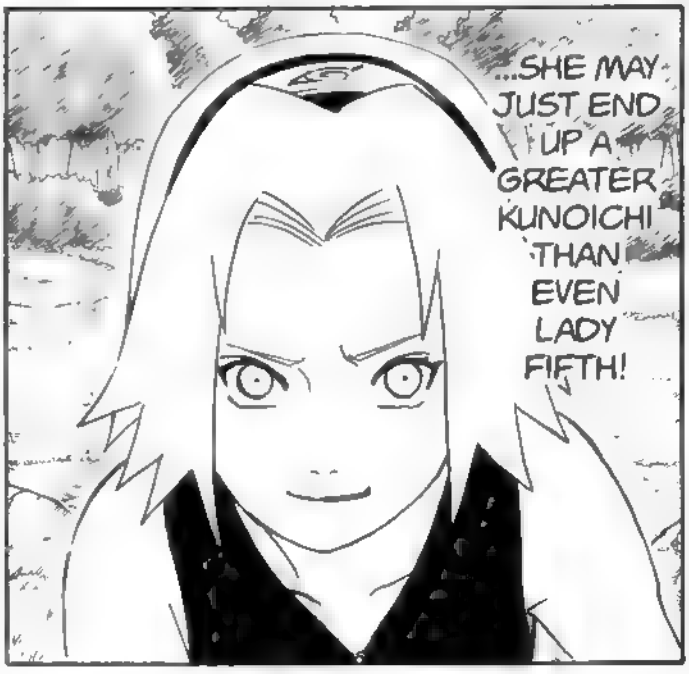
KA-BO
OM
WHOA!
WOBBLE

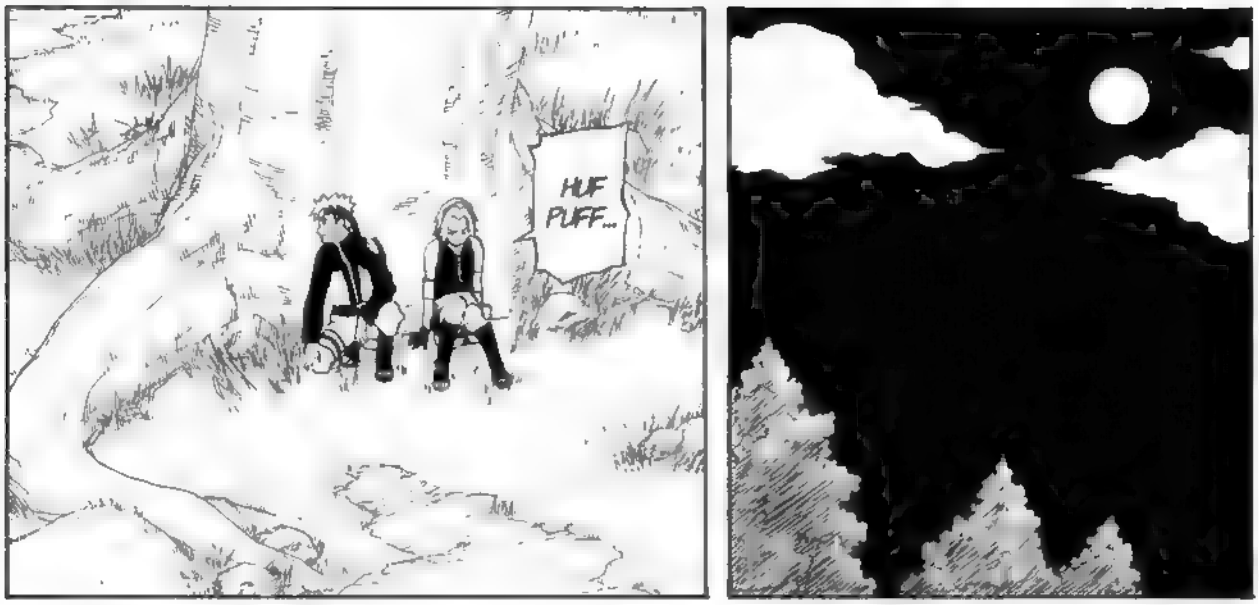
...SHE'LL KILL YOU...!
NOTE TO SELF: DO NOT UPSET SAKURA.

...BUT IF THIS DISPLAY OF SKILL IS ANY INDICATION...
SAKURA WAS ALWAYS ADEPT AT GENJUTSU...
JINGLE

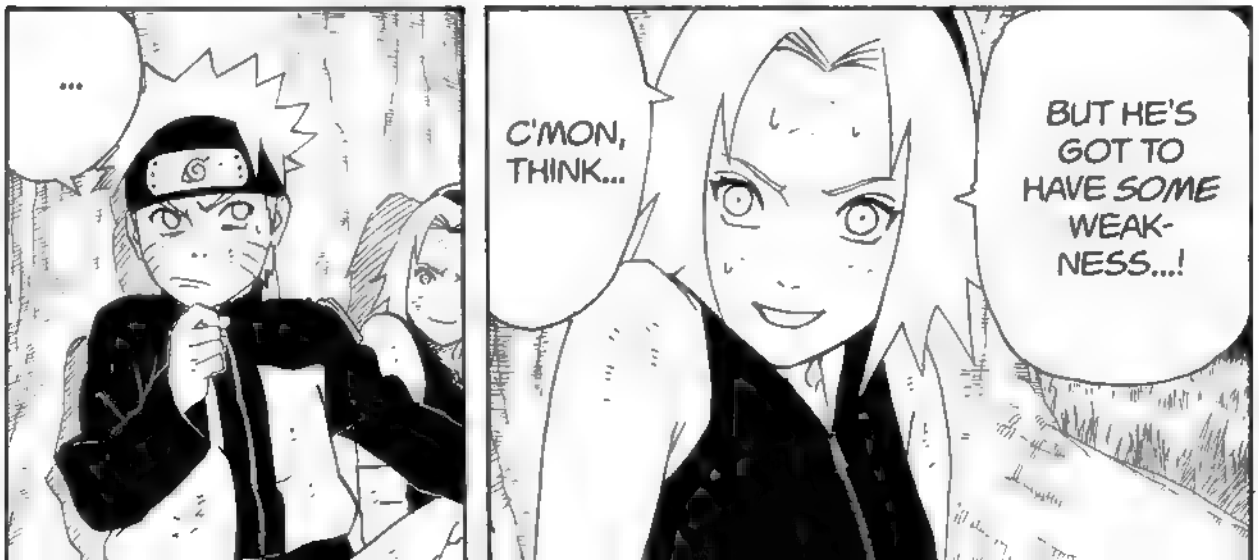
...IS NO SMALL FEAT. IT TAKES AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF CONTROL.
TO RAPIDLY MANIPULATE MAXIMUM CHAKRA AND INSTANTLY CONCENTRATE IT INTO ONE'S FIST...
SHOOF...

JINGLE
HAD YOUR SHOT, KIDS. MY TURN NOW...

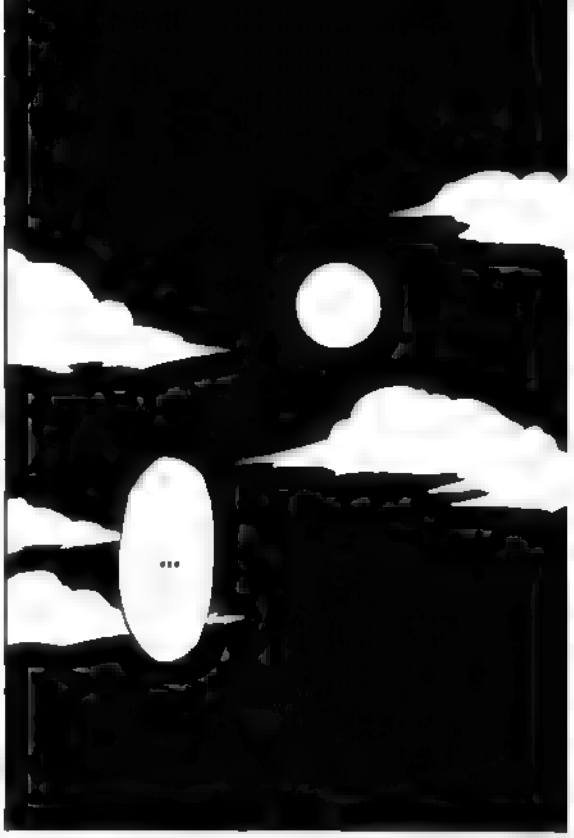

...SHE MAY JUST END UP A GREATER KUNOICHI THAN EVEN LADY FIFTH!


HUF PUFF...

SMARTER THAN SHIKAMARU... KEENER SENSE OF SMELL THAN KIBA...
YEAH...MASTER KAKASHI'S AS SUPER STRONG AS EVER.
...MORE ADEPT AT SHARINGAN THAN SASUKE... AND HIS TAIJUTSU'S GREATER THAN BUSHY BROW'S...
HIS ARMS... WE'VE GOT TO DISABLE THEM SOMEHOW... TIE THEM UP...
I KNEW IT WOULD STILL BE HARD, BUT THAT SHARINGAN SURE IS SOMETHING...
...PLUS, MASTER'S SIGN-WEAVING SPEED...HE'S SO FAST YOU CAN'T KEEP UP...
(HUF)
(HUF)

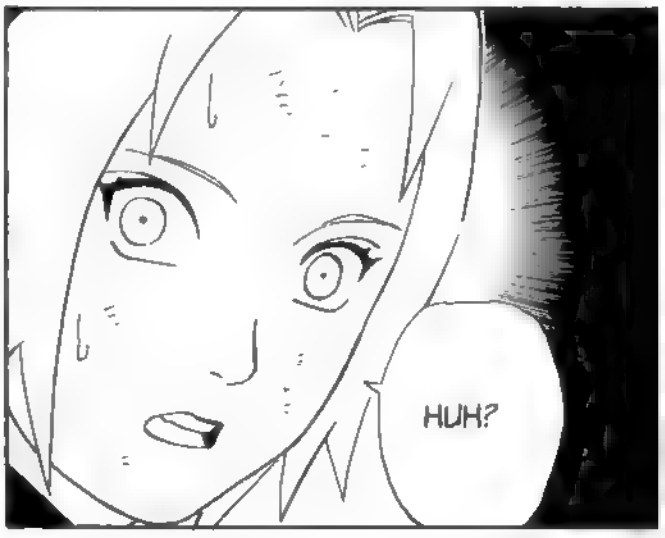

...
C'MON, THINK...
BUT HE'S GOT TO HAVE *SOME* WEAK-NESS...!

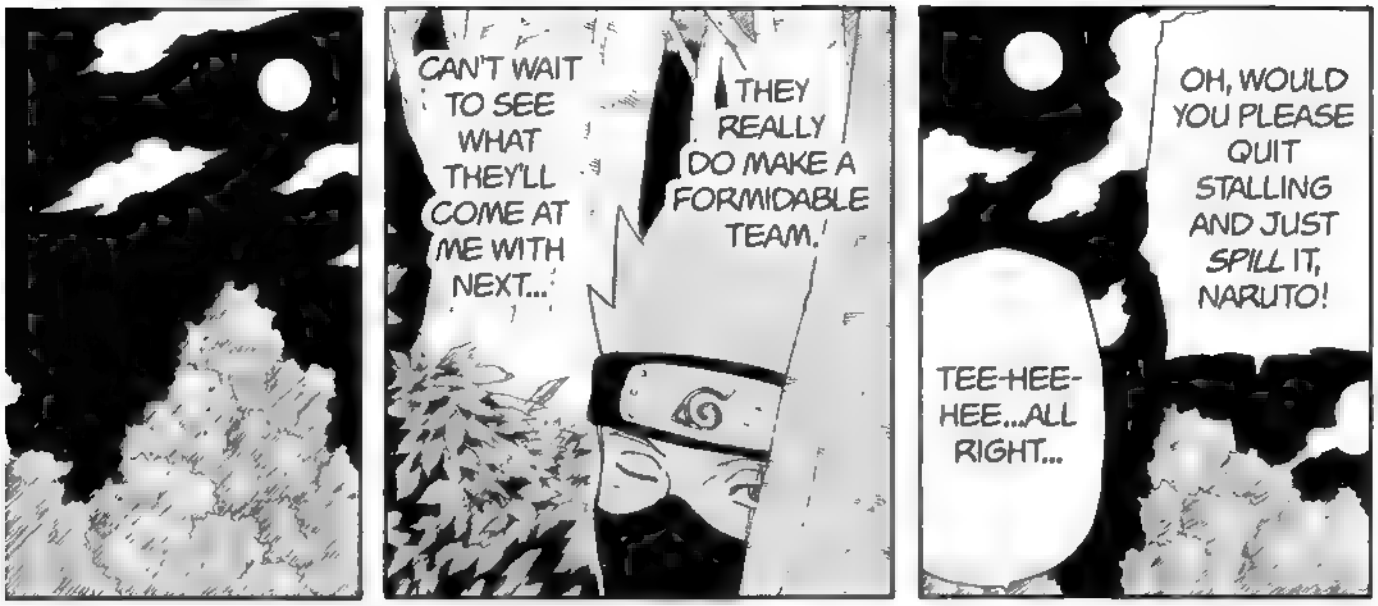
...BUT, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO HOLD THEM OFF UNTIL SUNRISE...
PHEW...CAN'T BELIEVE I'VE HAD TO USE MY SHARINGAN THIS MUCH... ITS BIGGEST DISADVANTAGE IS HOW QUICKLY IT DRAINS MY STAMINA...

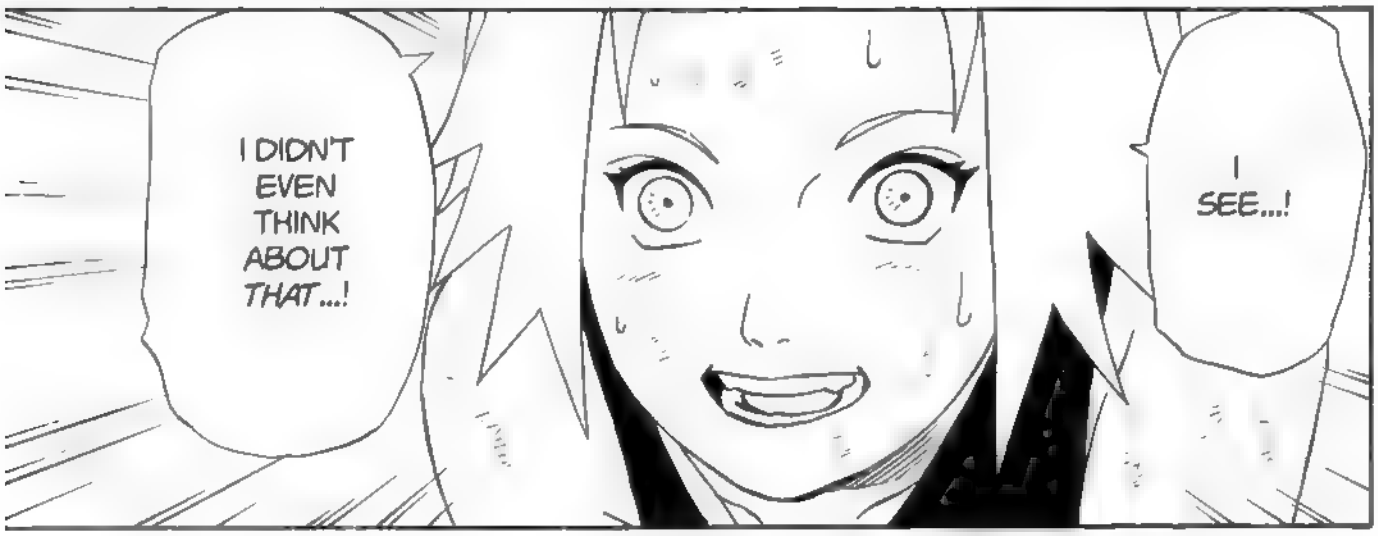

...

THERE IS ONE... WEAK-NESS...!
OH...!

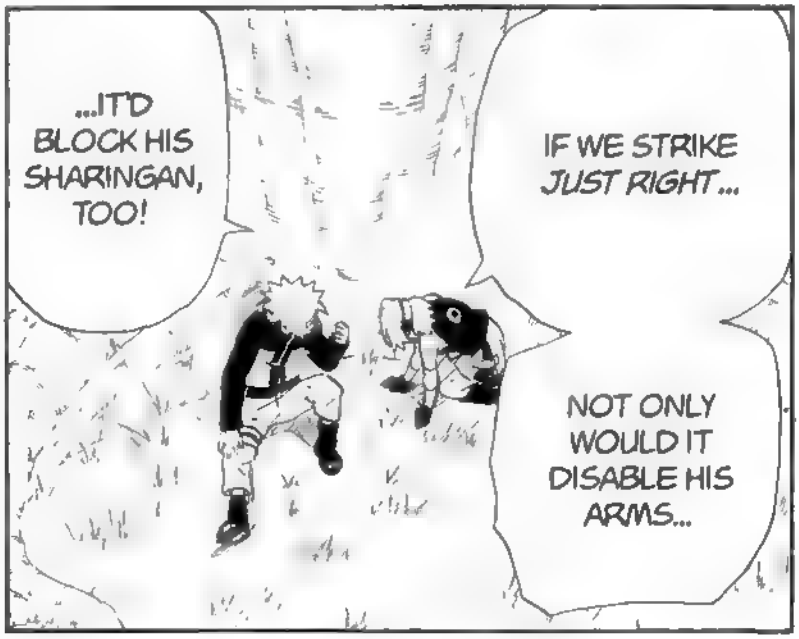
THINK CAREFULLY, AND YOU'LL SEE IT TOO...
HEH HEH... C'MON, SAKURA!
R... REALLY ...?!


HUH?


CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT THEY'LL COME AT ME WITH NEXT...
THEY REALLY DO MAKE A FORMIDABLE TEAM.
OH, WOULD YOU PLEASE QUIT STALLING AND JUST SPILL IT, NARUTO!
TEE-HEE-HEE...ALL RIGHT...


I DIDN'T EVEN THINK ABOUT THAT...!
I SEE...!

...YOU STILL ARE THE NO. 1 MAVERICK NINJA!
NARUTO...


...IT'D BLOCK HIS SHARINGAN, TOO!
IF WE STRIKE JUST RIGHT...
NOT ONLY WOULD IT DISABLE HIS ARMS...

ARE YOU READY?!
THEN WHAT ARE WE STANDING HERE LOOKING AT EACH OTHER FOR?
YUP! LET'S DO IT!

HERE THEY COME!

SNIFF SNIFF

POOP

A FRONTAL ASSAULT...? THEY'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING ME...

!

HERE I GO! HEY, MASTER KAKASHI...

NOW, NARUTO!

WH... WHAT?!!
!!!
THE MAIN CHARACTER IS REALLY...
...MAKE-OUT TACTICS' FINAL PLOT TWIST!
!!
CLAP
N...NO!!

BECAUSE OF THE SHARINGAN, I CAN STILL READ HIS LIPS!!
GAH!
CLAMP
OH!
JI-JINGLE
REMEMBER, MASTER?
HEH HEH... SHINOBI READ THE HIDDEN MEANINGS WITHIN THE HIDDEN MEANINGS.

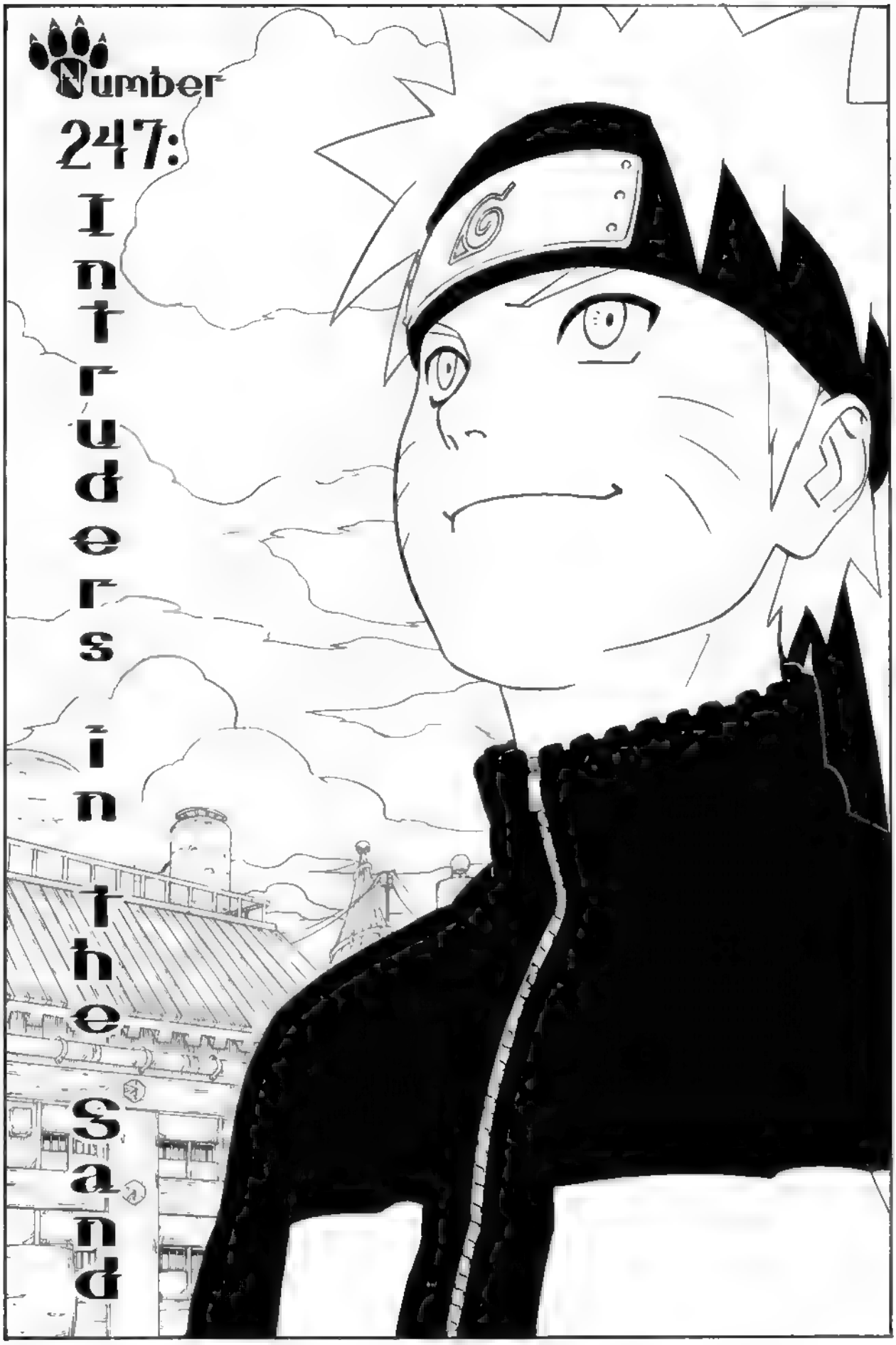
THE WORLD OF KISHIMOTO MASASHI
MY PERSONAL HISTORY, VIDEO GAMES PART I

SOMETIMES, IF I DRAW TOO LONG, I START THINKING, "HAVE I EVER SPENT TIME IN MY LIFE DOING ANYTHING OTHER THAN DRAWING PICTURES?"

AND THEN IT COMES TO ME. YES, THERE IS ONE OTHER THING.

WHICH IS...VIDEO GAMES.

EVER SINCE I WAS A KID, I LOVED PLAYING VIDEO GAMES ALMOST AS MUCH AS I LOVED DRAWING. MY FRIENDS ALL DID, TOO... AND EVEN MY FOLKS, SO I DON'T THINK OF MYSELF AS AN EXCEPTION... BUT IN ANY CASE, I LOVED VIDEO GAMES AND PLAYED THEM A LOT. OF COURSE, THE STANDARD GAME PLATFORM AT THE TIME WAS THE FAMILY COMPUTER, A.K.A. THE FAMICOM.


Number
247:
Intruders in the Sand

肉まん
I HONESTLY DIDN'T THINK YOU'D MANAGE TO TAKE THE BELLS!
GAB GAB
MY, MY, HOW YOU GUYS HAVE GROWN!
GAB GAB
どん

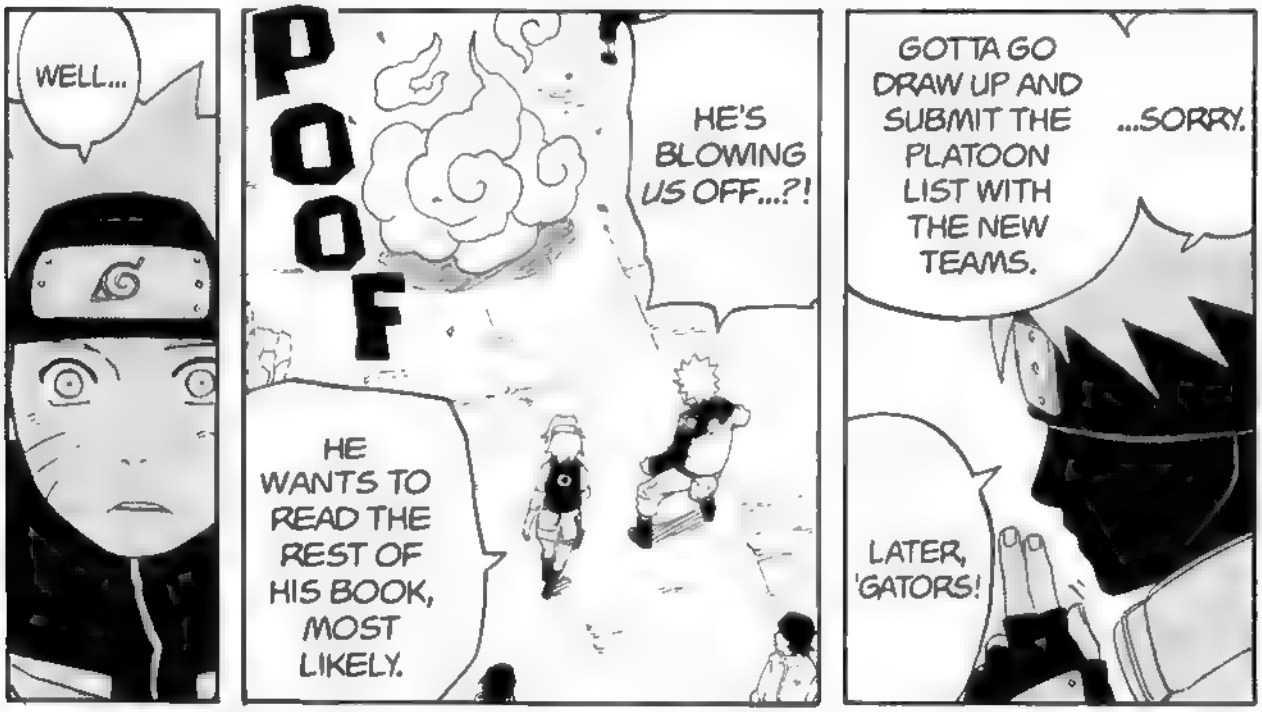
AFTER ALL, THIS OLD DOG'S STILL GOT SOME NEW TRICKS...
SOMEDAY... MAYBE...
...IN FACT, JUST THE OTHER DAY, I INVENTED THIS AMAZING NEW JUTSU...

LIKE THAT'LL EVER HAPPEN!
HEH HEH! MAYBE I'VE SURPASSED YOU, MASTER KAKASHI!

...
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I'M STARVING FROM LAST NIGHT'S CHALLENGE.
HEY... BUT I STILL HAVEN'T HAD MY ICHIRAKU RAMEN!

GRROWL

YEAH! GOOD IDEA!
HEY, I KNOW! MASTER KAKASHI CAN TREAT US!
...WHO USED TO REACT WITH WONDER AT EVERYTHING I SAID AND DID...
...I MISS THE CUTE LITTLE NEWBIES...


WELL...
POOF
HE'S BLOWING US OFF...?!
HE WANTS TO READ THE REST OF HIS BOOK, MOST LIKELY.
GOTTA GO DRAW UP AND SUBMIT THE PLATOON LIST WITH THE NEW TEAMS.
...SORRY.
LATER, 'GATORS!

!
WE CAN STILL GO WITHOUT HIM. THE TWO OF US. LIKE IT'S A DATE...
DOES THAT MEAN YOU'RE BUYING...?

!
!

!

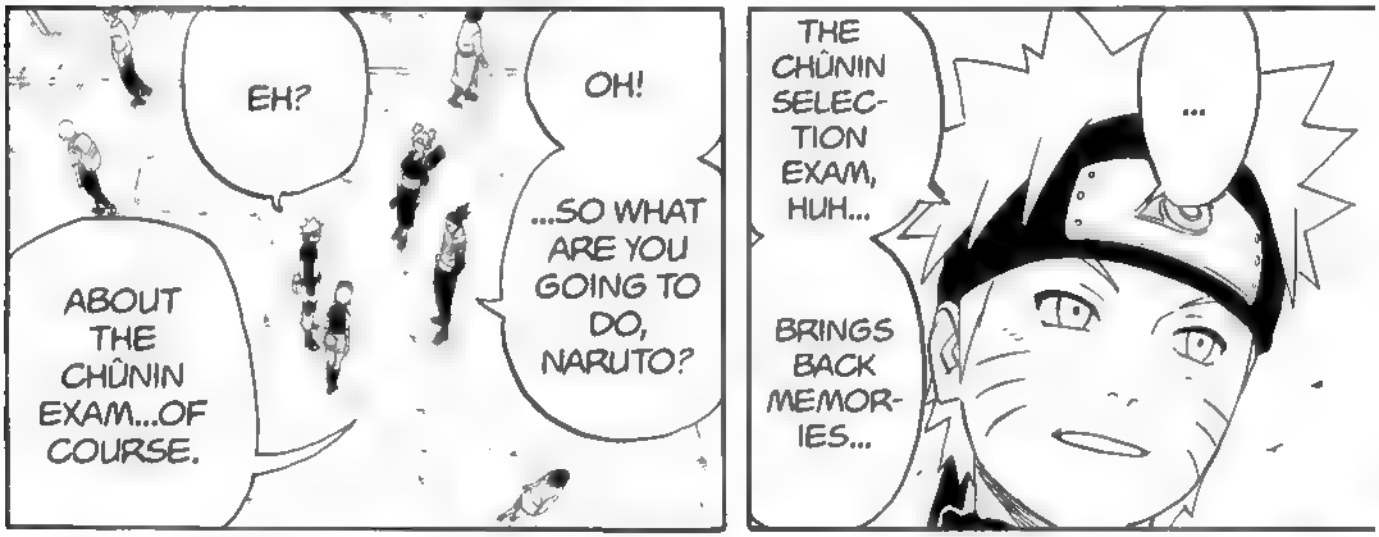
LOOK WHO'S BACK!!
SHIKAMARU! TEMARI! HEY!
!

...THAT SHORTY ...?
WAIT...
SHIKA-MARU!!
!
NARUTO!
HEY!

SOMETHING'S DIFFERENT ABOUT YOU... YOU SEEM SMARTER ...
...MORE SERIOUS...
NAH, YESTERDAY.
DID YOU JUST GET BACK?

SLINK!
SO... YOU TWO ARE ON A DATE, TOO?
!
OH... REALLY?
SAKURA!
NUH-UH
ERNT! WRONG ANSWER! PLEASE TRY AGAIN!
WHAT...

...I'M BEING FORCED TO ACT AS EXAM PROCTOR, SO...
...I WAS ORDERED TO ESCORT THE SAND AMBASSADOR, THAT'S ALL.
OH PLEASE, LIKE I WOULD EVER...?
IT'S ALMOST CHÛNIN SELECTION EXAM TIME AGAIN. AND WHILE I'VE BEEN ACTING AS LIAISON BETWEEN THE SAND AND KONOHA...
NOT. EVEN. CLOSE.


EH?
ABOUT THE CHÛNIN EXAM...OF COURSE.
OH!
...SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, NARUTO?
...
THE CHÛNIN SELEC-TION EXAM, HUH...
BRINGS BACK MEMOR-IES...

...WHO ISN'T A CHÛNIN.
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE IN OUR YEAR...

WHAT ?!!!

NO WAY !!
...NEJI, KANKURO, AND THIS LADY HERE ARE ALREADY JÔNIN.
...AND, JUST SO YOU KNOW...

YUP.
YOU MEAN... YOU'RE A CHÛNIN TOO, SAKURA?

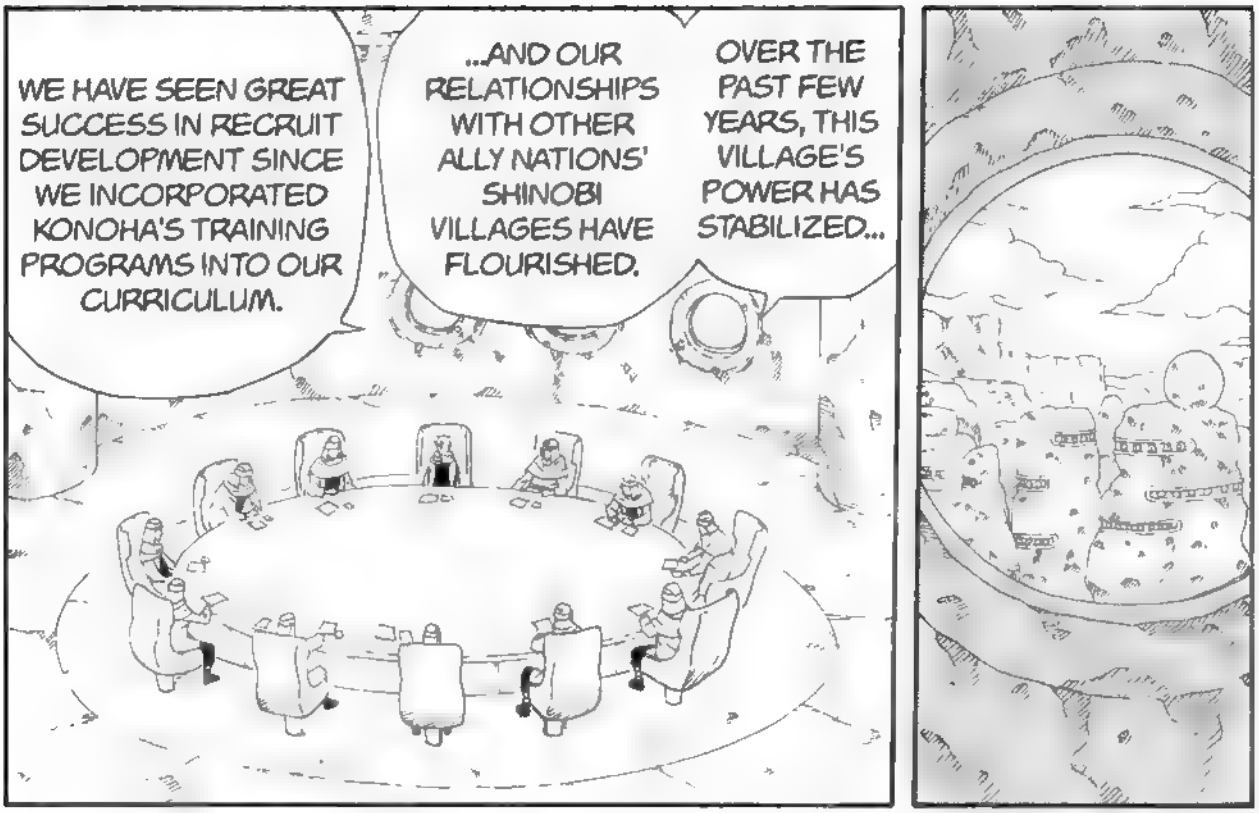
風

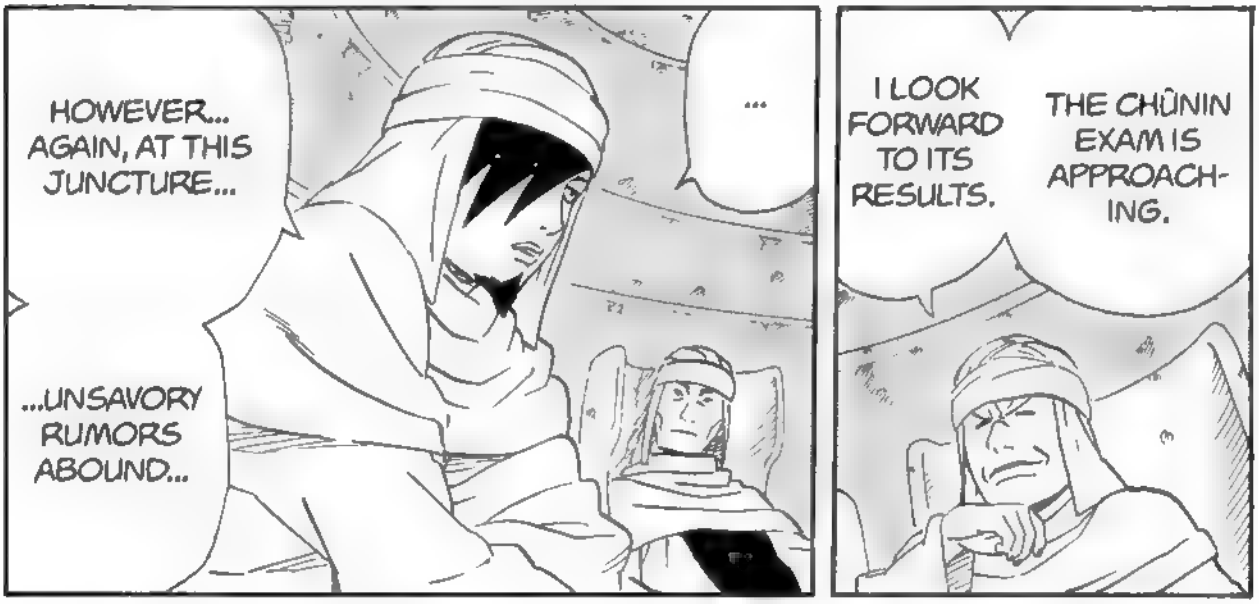
WHAT ABOUT GAARA?
GAARA!

OH!

LORD KAZEKAGE...
...IT IS TIME.

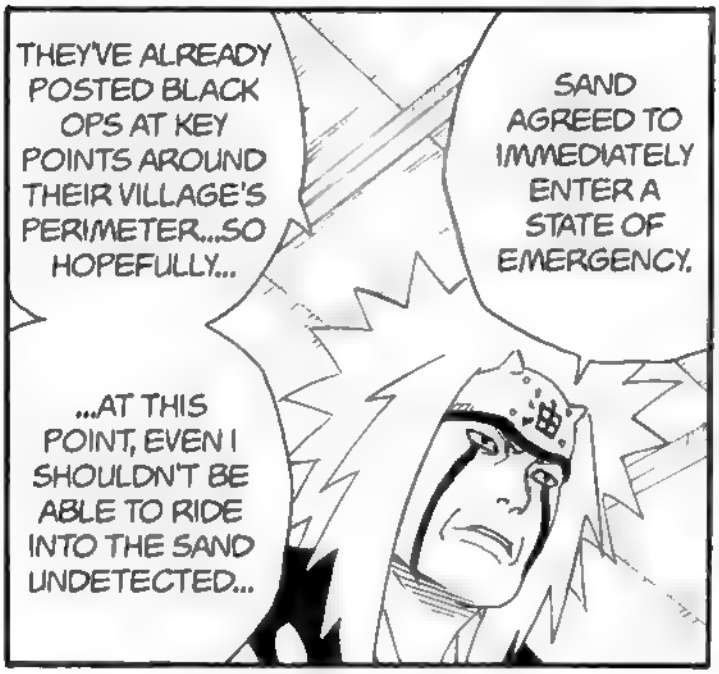
愛
VERY WELL.


WE HAVE SEEN GREAT SUCCESS IN RECRUIT DEVELOPMENT SINCE WE INCORPORATED KONOHA'S TRAINING PROGRAMS INTO OUR CURRICULUM.
...AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ALLY NATIONS' SHINOBI VILLAGES HAVE FLOURISHED.
OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, THIS VILLAGE'S POWER HAS STABILIZED...


HOWEVER... AGAIN, AT THIS JUNCTURE...
...UNSAVORY RUMORS ABOUND...
...
I LOOK FORWARD TO ITS RESULTS.
THE CHŪNIN EXAM IS APPROACH-ING.

SUCH AS?

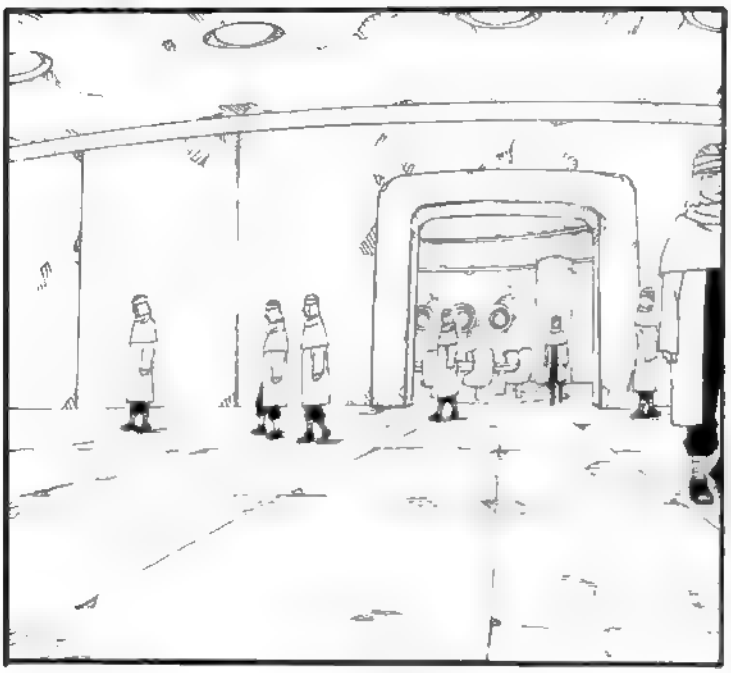
...BUT HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF AN ORGANIZATION CALLED "THE AKATSUKI"?
THIS IS FROM LORD JIRAIYA, ONE OF THE LEGENDARY THREE GREAT SHINOBI...


THEY'VE ALREADY POSTED BLACK OPS AT KEY POINTS AROUND THEIR VILLAGE'S PERIMETER...SO HOPEFULLY...
SAND AGREED TO IMMEDIATELY ENTER A STATE OF EMERGENCY.
...AT THIS POINT, EVEN I SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO RIDE INTO THE SAND UNDETECTED...

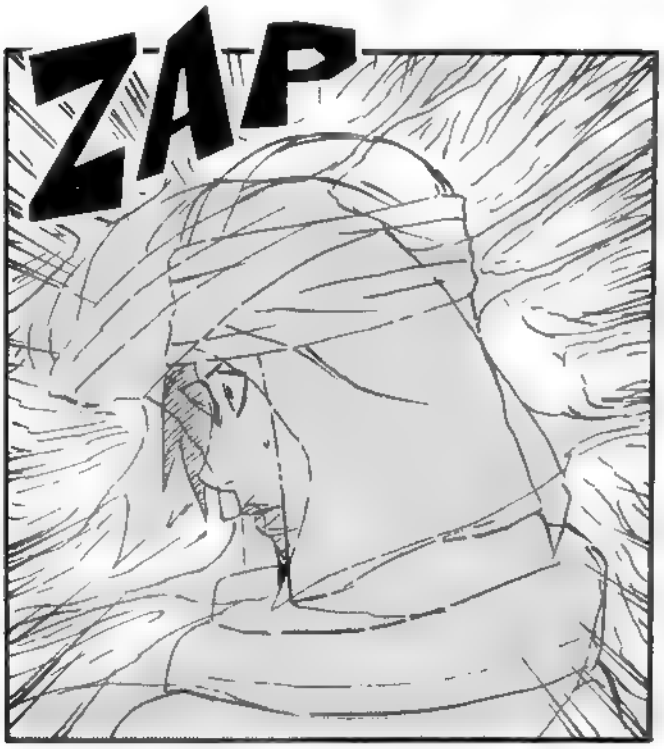
愛

WHICH IS WHY I'M HEADING OUT AGAIN.
だんご

WHAT DO THEY SEEK?
SO WHY HAS THE AKATSUKI STARTED MOVING ABOUT SO OVERTLY?
THAT I STILL DON'T KNOW.



WELL...THAT CONCLUDES OUR COUNCIL.


ZAP

I HAVE BEEN A SENIOR OFFICIAL FOR FOUR YEARS.
NICE WORK, YURA...TAKING THE INITIATIVE TO TIGHTEN VILLAGE SECURITY EVEN PRIOR TO TODAY'S MEETING.
AND WITH LORD JIRAIYA AS THE INTELLIGENCE SOURCE... PERHAPS IT WAS HASTY, BUT I THOUGHT IT PRUDENT.

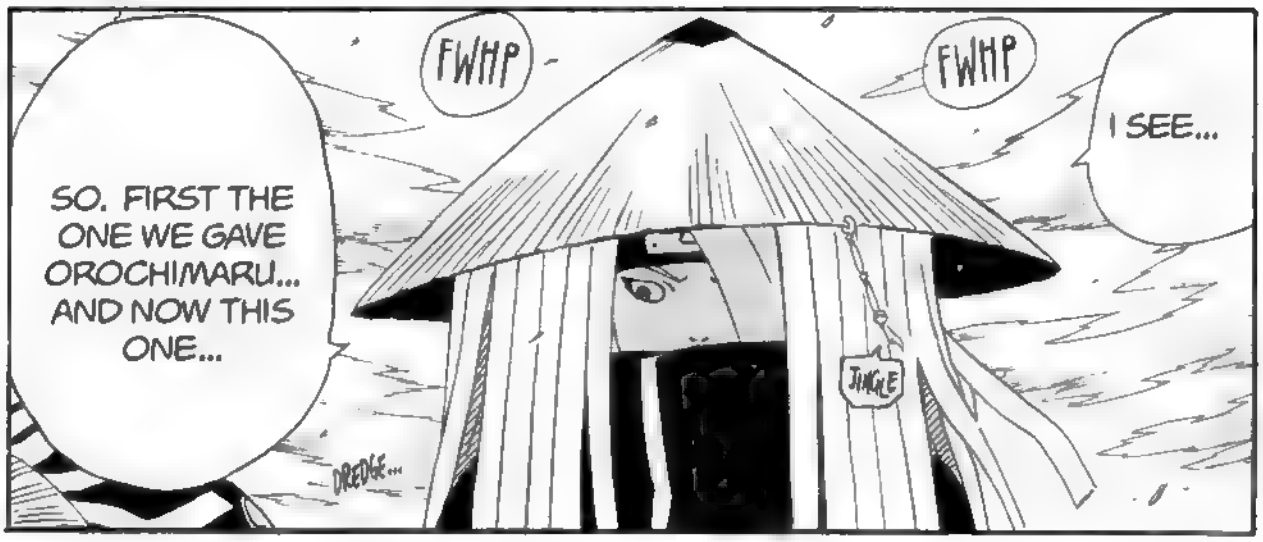
...

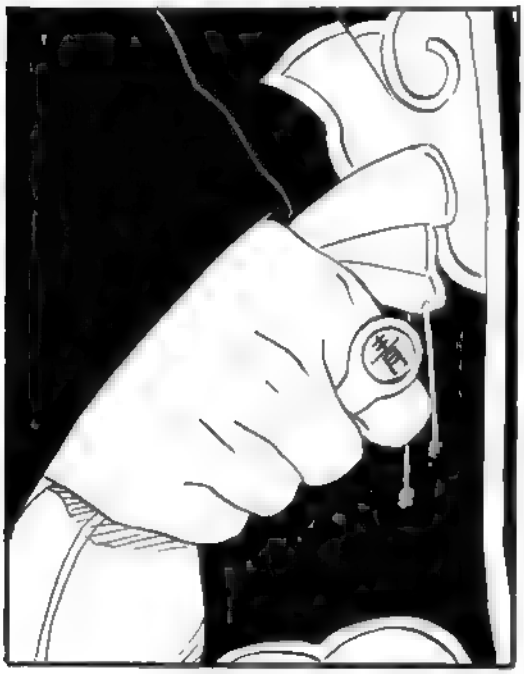
...TAKE CARE OF YOUR-SELF...
OH, UH... NOTHING MUCH...
JUST A LITTLE SLEEP-DEPRIVA-TION...

WHAT IS IT?
!

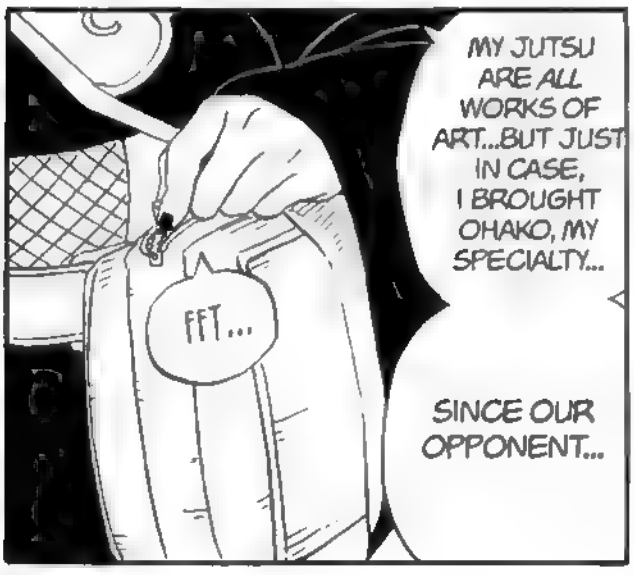
...SO THAT'S WHAT'S...
I SEE...

WHOOOOO
(WHP)
(WHP)
DREDGE DREDGE

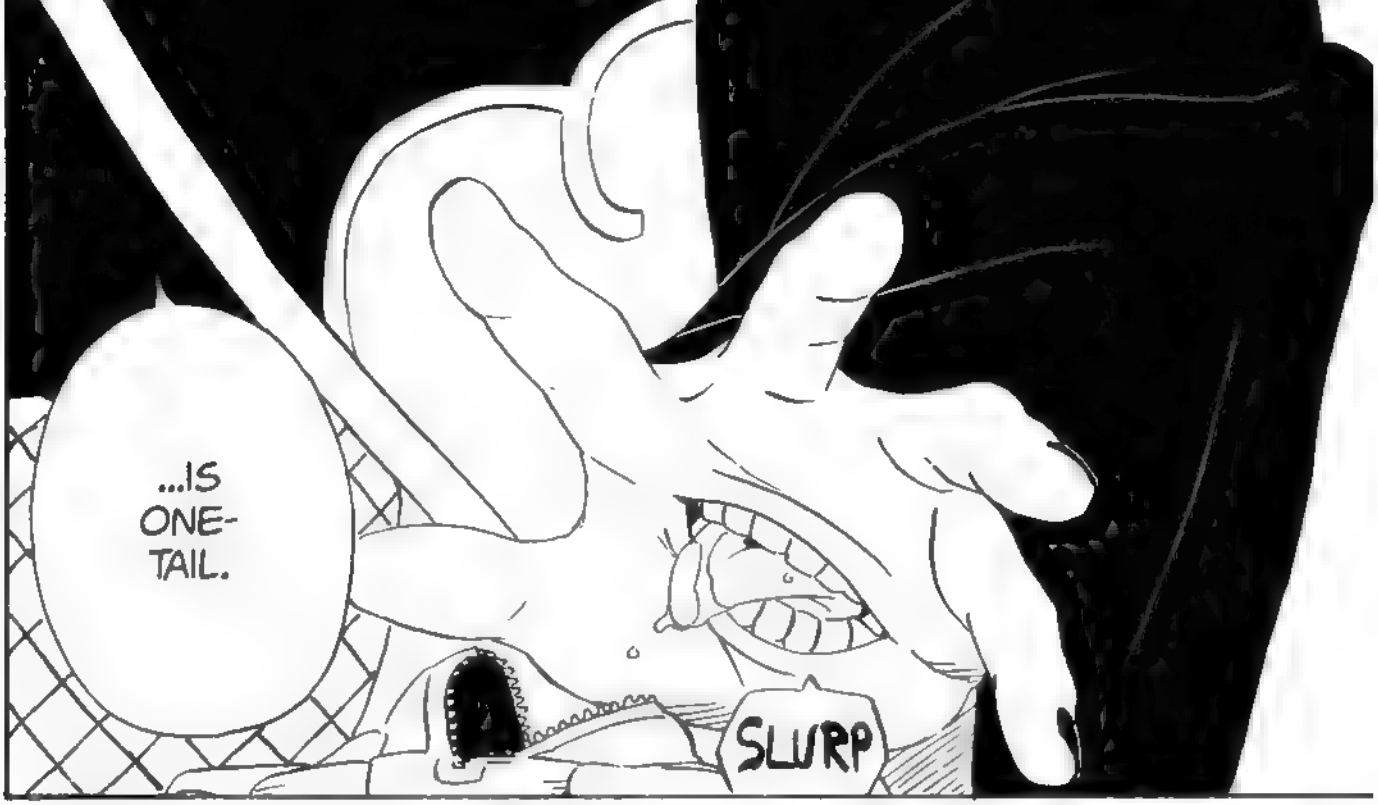

SO. FIRST THE ONE WE GAVE OROCHIMARU... AND NOW THIS ONE...
FWHP -
FWHP
I SEE...
JINGLE
DREDGE...

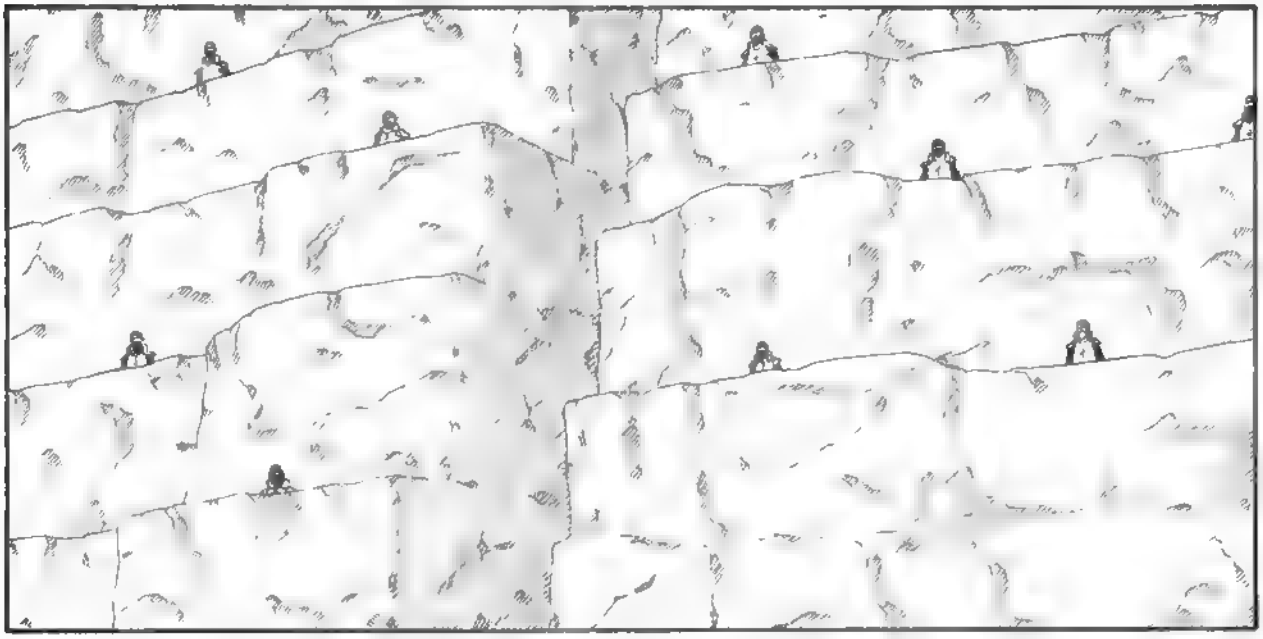


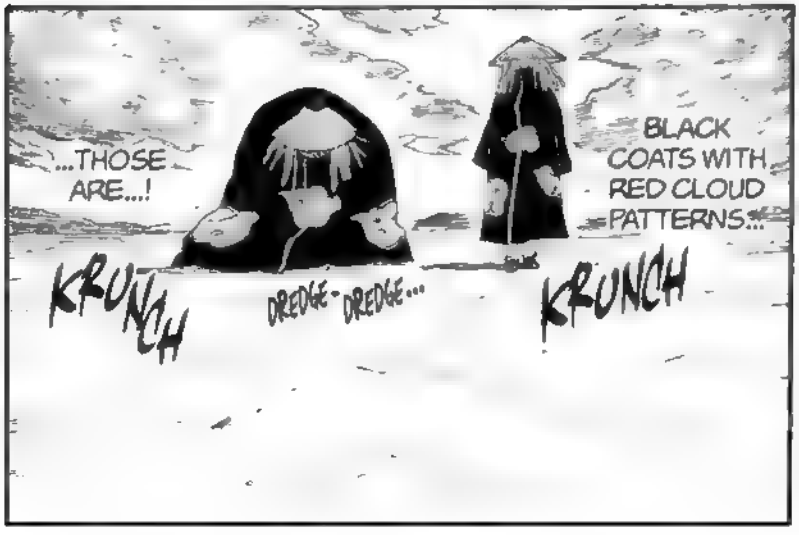
ONCE I CAST THE JUTSU, THERE'S NO TELLING HOW THEY'LL TURN OUT.
SORRY. CAN'T BE HELPED.
ARE OUR SECRETS SAFE WITH NO ONE?
DREDGE- DREDGE
FWHP FWHP

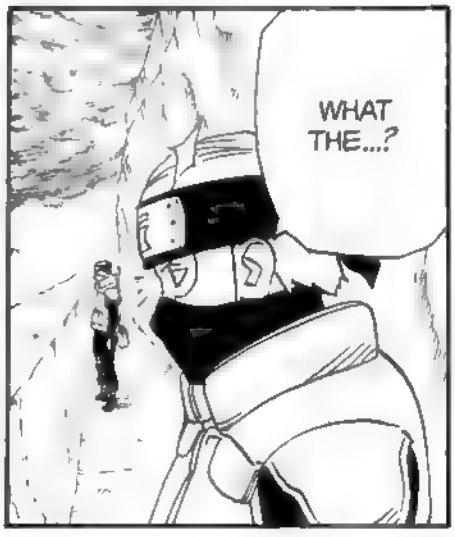

MY JUTSU ARE ALL WORKS OF ART...BUT JUST IN CASE, I BROUGHT OHAKO, MY SPECIALTY...
FFT...
SINCE OUR OPPONENT...

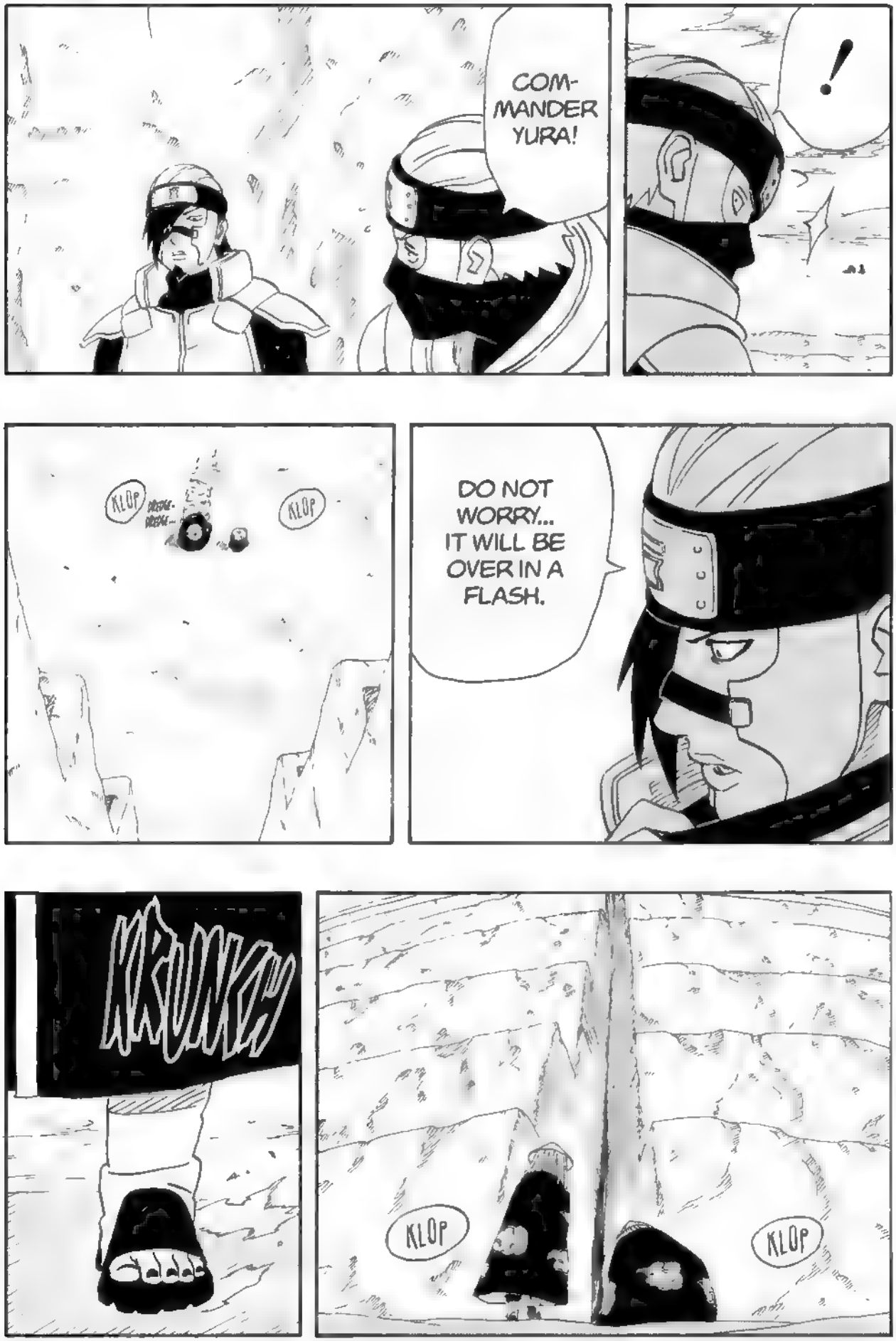
ARE YOU SURE THAT ONE BAG'S ENOUGH?
OUR OPPONENT IS A JINCHÛRIKI HOST...

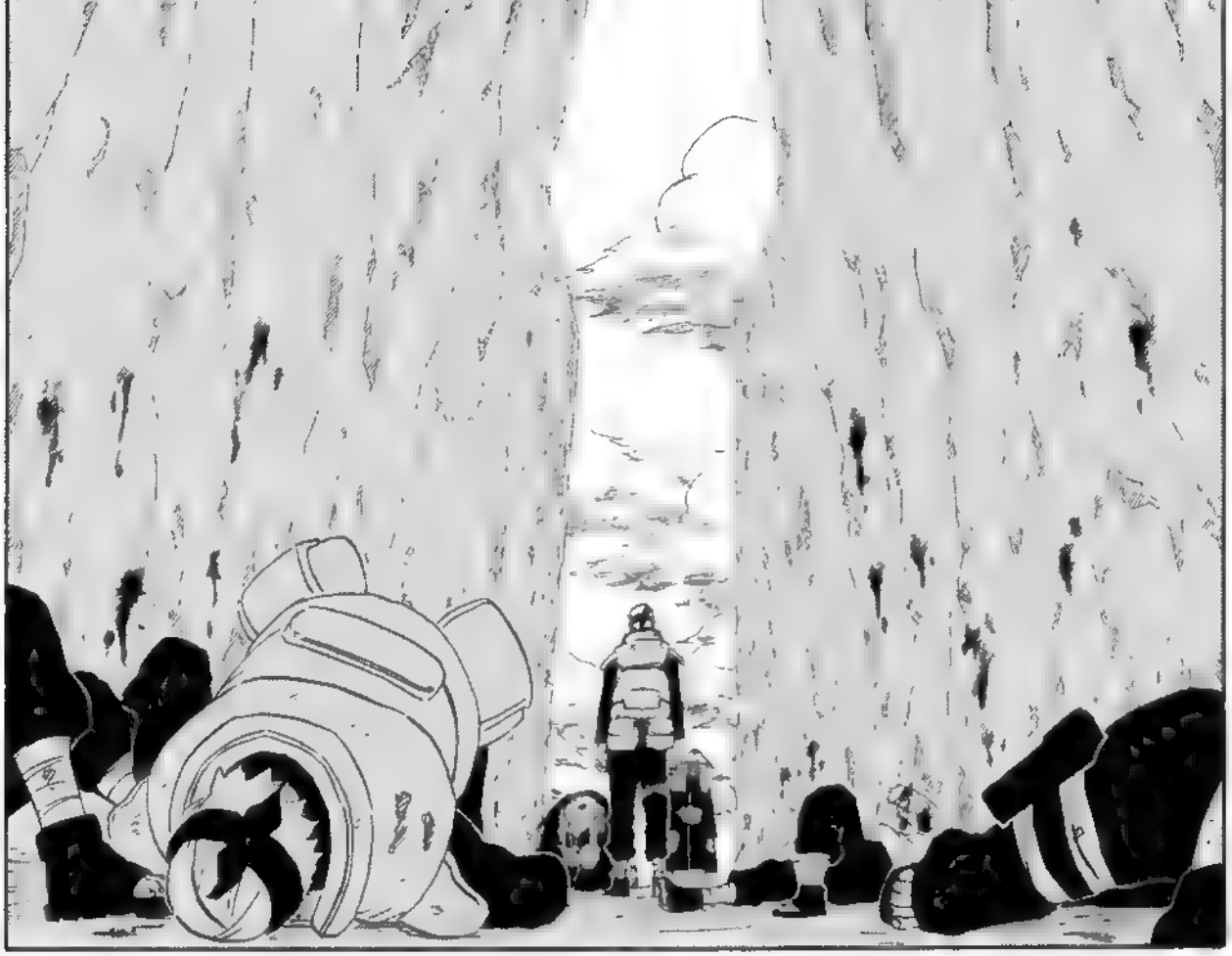

...IS ONE-TAIL.
SLURP



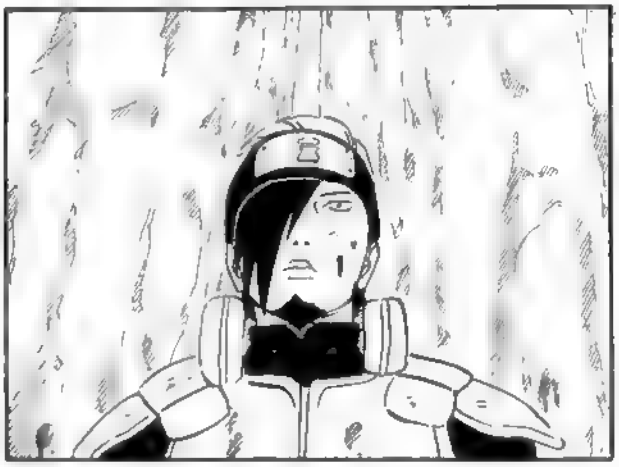

...THOSE ARE...!
BLACK COATS WITH RED CLOUD PATTERNS...!!
KRUNCH
DREDGE-DREDGE...
KRUNCH


WHAT THE...?


COM-
MANDER
YURA!
!
KLOP
KLOP
DO NOT
WORRY...
IT WILL BE
OVER IN A
FLASH.
KLOP
KLOP



YES, SIR!
THUMP
VERY GOOD... DO YOU REMEMBER ME NOW?
OF COURSE, LORD SASORI!



GNAW GNAW
LET'S GET TO IT, THEN...
FFT...

ONCE THEIR MEMORIES ARE RESTORED, THEY'RE LOYAL SERVANTS.
OF COURSE YOU DO.
IF YOU'D FORGOTTEN, IT WOULDN'T BE A GOOD JUTSU NOW, WOULD IT...?

READ THIS WAY
POP
CLENCH
MASH
BELCH
KRUNCH
SASORI, YOU JUST WATCH ME...
BOOF
I WILL ATTACK FROM ABOVE.
SHWIP SHWIP
HOP

SHOOF
...SHOW ME YOUR ART...
ONE-TAILED SHUKAKU'S HOST, GAARA OF THE SAND...
JUST DON'T KEEP ME WAITING.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY ARTISTIC CREATION, HMMM?
FLIP

THE WORLD OF KISHIMOTO MASASHI
MY PERSONAL HISTORY, VIDEO GAMES PART 2

AS I PREVIOUSLY WROTE IN VOLUME 25, I ESPECIALLY LIKED CARTRIDGE GAMES, SUCH AS "THE LEGEND OF ZELDA," "ZELDA 2: ADVENTURE OF LINK," "THE MYSTERIOUS CASTLE MURASAME," "KID ICARUS," "CASTLEVANIA," AND "METROID." YOU COULD SAVE AND RELOAD THESE GAMES, WHICH, FOR ME BACK THEN, WAS TREMENDOUSLY APPEALING. RECENTLY, MANY OF THESE GAMES WERE RE-RELEASED FOR THE GAME BOY, SO I DECIDED TO TRY THEM OUT AGAIN... I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED TO DISCOVER THEY WERE STILL QUITE FUN. IN FACT, I BEAT THEM ALL (ALTHOUGH BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE A LOT OF FREE TIME, I WAS ONLY PLAYING THEM SPORADICALLY).

MOST OF MY CURRENT ASSISTANTS ARE ALSO OF THE FAMICOM GENERATION, SO WE OFTEN REMINISCE ABOUT THAT ERA, HAVING DISCUSSIONS LIKE, "REMEMBER HOW WE HAD TO 'RIOT' WITH JUST TWO CHARACTERS," OR "IN MISSISSIPPI ["MURDER ON THE MISSISSIPPI"], REMEMBER HOW YOU COULD KILL WITH JUST A SINGLE KNIFE THRUST," AND SO ON. AT SOME POINT, THE CONVERSATION WOULD ALWAYS TURN TO EITHER TO *DRAGON QUEST* OR THE *FINAL FANTASY* SERIES (I BET IT'S TRUE FOR YOU ALL AS WELL). WITH ONLY PARTIAL ALLEGIANCES--I.E. FF FANS WHO STILL LIKE DQ AND DQ FANS WHO STILL OWN FF GAMES--THERE EMERGE SOME BIZARRE COMMENTS. AS THE TALK GETS MORE AND MORE HEATED, SOMEONE WILL INVARIABLY SHOUT OUT, "SO WHAT ABOUT YOU, KISHIMOTO-SAN?"

AND MY REPLY WOULD BE, "I LOVE TORIYAMA-SENSEI'S ART, AND THE VERY FIRST GAME I EVER BOUGHT WAS DRAGON QUEST, SO I WANT TO SAY I'M A DQ FAN... BUT I WAS ALSO DRAWN TO FF BECAUSE OF ITS GLITCHES, LIKE THE ABILITY TO LEVEL-UP BY ATTACKING ONE'S ALLIES IN FFII AND TO CANCEL ATTACKS BY PRESSING THE A AND B BUTTONS SIMULTANEOUSLY. IN FFIV, THE LITTLE TWINS PALOM AND POROM MADE ME CRY EVEN THOUGH IT WAS A GAME. THE TRANSITION FROM PIXEL ART TO POLYGONAL 3D, COMPUTER GRAPHICS IN FFVII WAS SO GROUNDBREAKING THAT I CAN'T DENY THAT I LOVE FF AS WELL. SO AM I A FF MANIAC? ...YET DQ WAS SO BALANCED TOO. I LOVED HOW PRINCE SAMANTORIA OF DQII--WHO ALWAYS DIED SO EASILY--WAS ABLE TO MASTER THE ZAORIKU, OR REVIVE SPELL. AND EVEN THOUGH THE "SPELL OF RESURRECTION" WAS REALLY LONG, THE MUSIC THAT PLAYED DURING THE PASSWORD SCREEN BECAME MY FAVORITE OF THE DQ SERIES. BUT THEN, DQI~III'S "LEGEND OF THE HERO LOTO", IS A THREE-PART WORK THAT REALLY WAS A CLASSIC FOR ME TOO.

...SO IT'S REALLY HARD FOR ME TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE TWO. AND MY ASSISTANTS, TOO, THEY ALWAYS END UP GIVING VAGUE ANSWERS AS WELL. SO THE DEBATE IS USUALLY SETTLED WITH MUTUAL ADMIRATION FOR AND AGREEMENT ABOUT HOW INCREDIBLE THE COLLABORATION PROJECT GAME "CHRONO TRIGGER" WAS. WE ALL JUST LOVE VIDEO GAMES.

Number 248:

The Sand Strike Back...!! zz

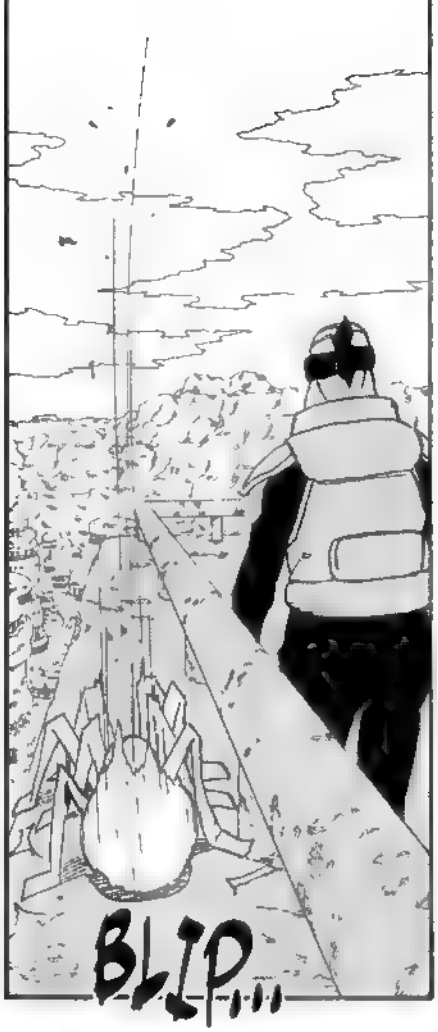
WHOOOOOO
WHO
KLIK-KLIK
OOOO
ONE, TWO, THREE...

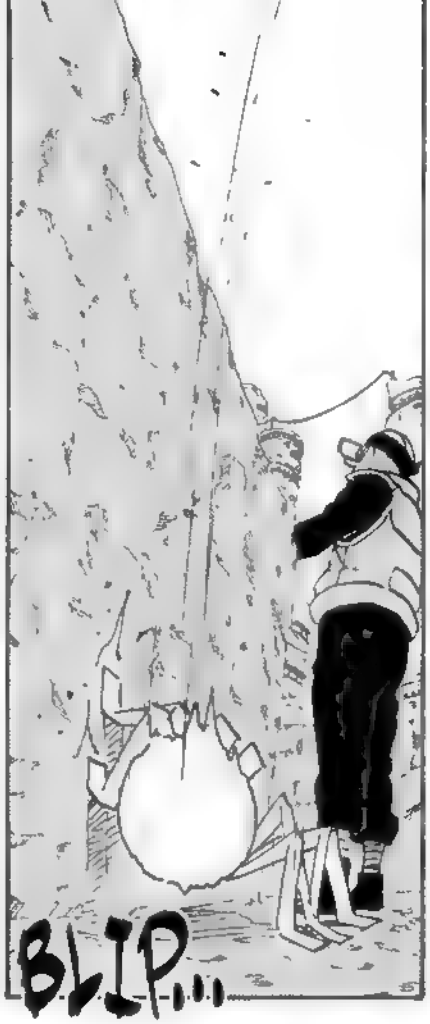
THREE ROOFTOP SCOUTS...

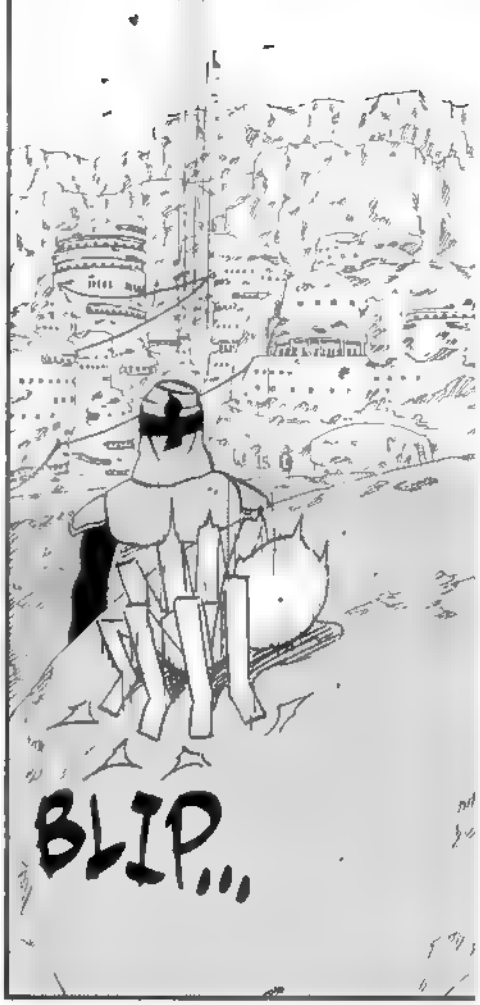
FIRST STROKE... COVERT OPS...
WHISH...

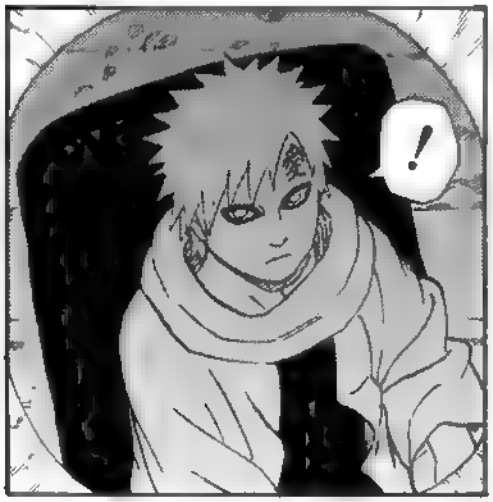
ALL THE MORE PLEASING TO DESTROY IT THEN, HMMM?!
THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN OF THIS VILLAGE IS SURPRISINGLY TASTEFUL...
RUSTLE

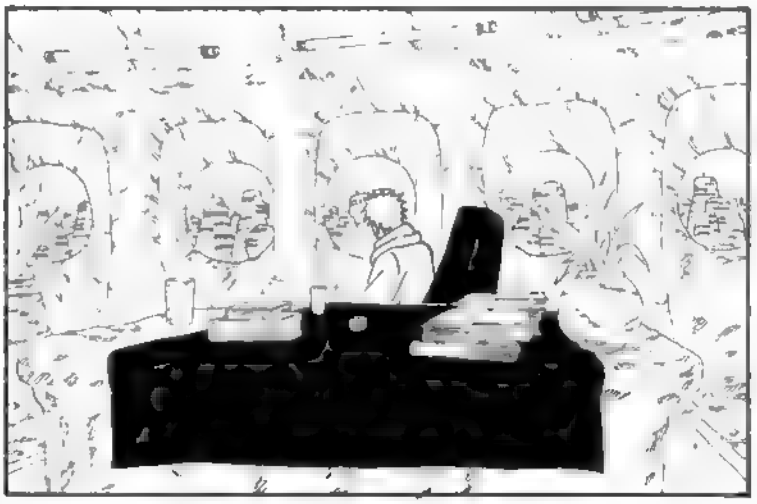
POOF
POOF
POOF
SHW
UP
FLIP...


BLIP...


BLIP...


BLIP...


!

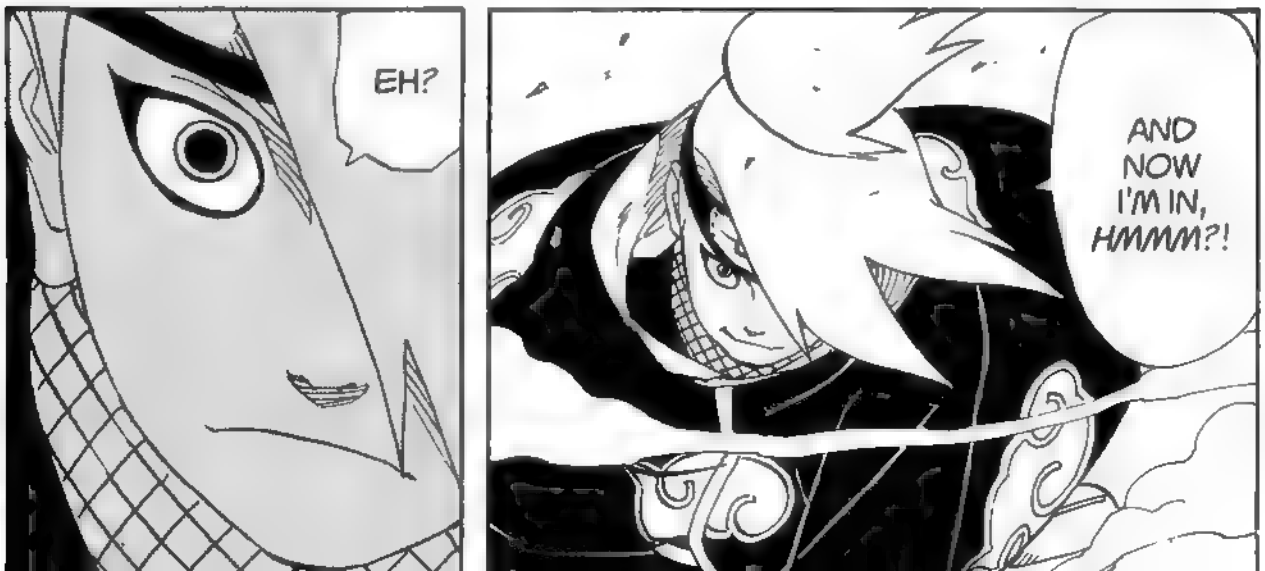


WH...WHAT'S THIS WEIRD THING?!
!
SKRIT
CREEP...
SOME PEOPLE WOULDN'T KNOW TRUE ART IF IT BIT THEM IN THE FACE.
"THING"...? PHILISTINE!
WH
!!
AP
CROUCH...
BUT I'LL SHOW YOU TRUE ART...
FLAIL
UGGH!
FLAIL

YEAGH
TRUE ART IS REVOLUTIONARY... INCENDIARY...
...AN EXPLOSION!

BOOM

HEE HEE HEE...
SWOOOOO
THUMP
SOOO

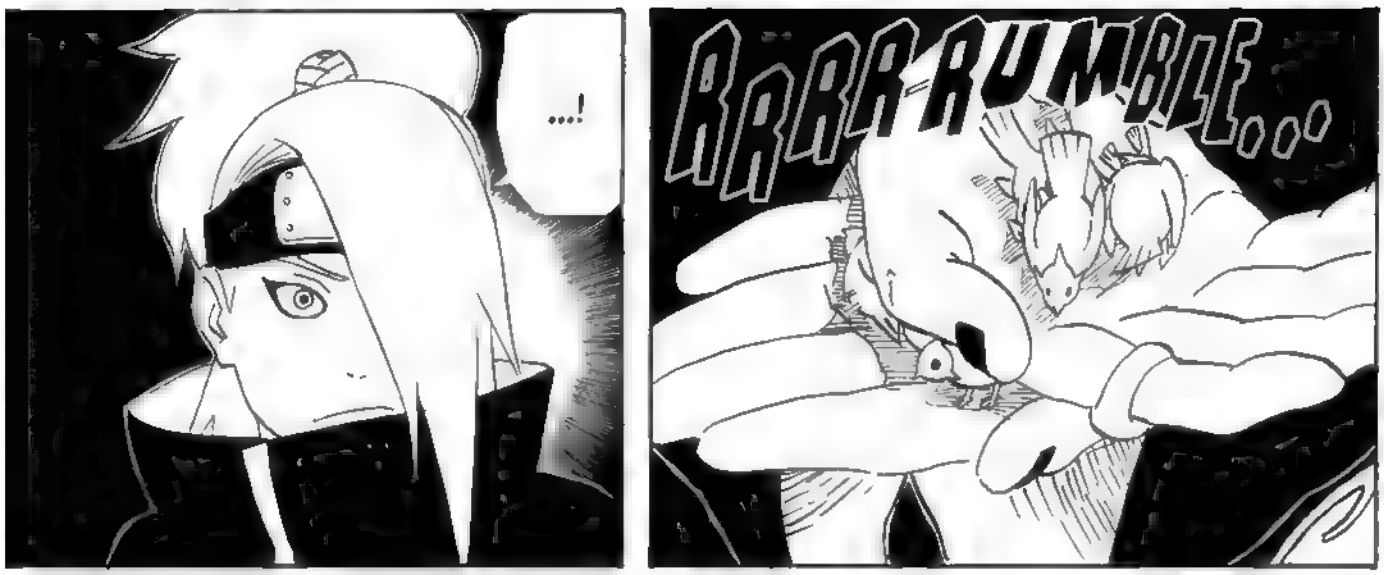

EH?
AND NOW I'M IN, HMMM?!

SHOOM

WHOA.

TAP
FSSH...
SHOOF
KAS
SHOOF
SKEE...
ZWHOOOO
OOOSH

HO... THAT'S QUITE USEFUL...
BUT HOW DID YOU KNOW, HMMM?
GNAW GNAW
TAP
ZWOOOO
RISE
THERE ARE NO SUCH BIRDS...
...IN THIS DESERT.
FLAP
FLAP
SO THE OPERATION FAILED, HMMM?
FSSSH
FSSSH
BUT AT LEAST I DON'T HAVE TO SEARCH FOR YOU ANYMORE.
SWA...
SWA...

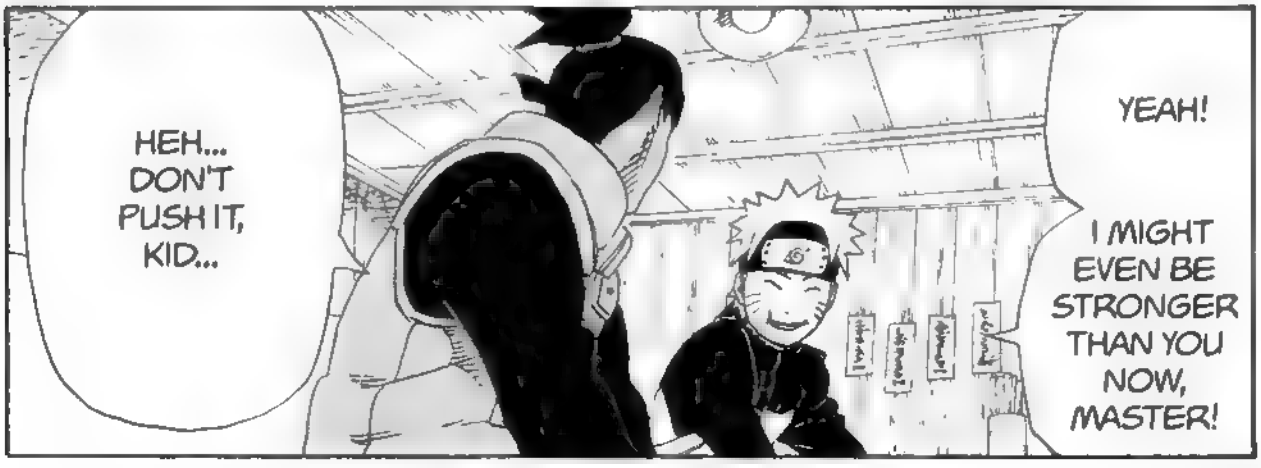

...!
RRRRUMBLE...

BLAST
AH! AN INGENIOUS USE OF THE TOPO-GRAPHY...
AT LAST, AN AUDIENCE WORTHY OF MY ART!

YEAH, I GUESS SO...
DON'T GET SO HUNG UP ON RANK, NARUTO.
...BUT MASTER IRUKA, THAT PERVY SAGE, HE DOESN'T HOLD BACK!
YOU'VE BEEN TRAINING UNDER LORD JIRAIYA. THAT COUNTS FOR A LOT MORE.

THE TRAINING YOU'VE ENDURED CANNOT. WHY, JUST LOOK AT HOW *STRONG* YOU'VE BECOME!
CLOTHES CAN BE REPLACED.

REMEMBER THAT HEADBAND YOU GAVE ME? THE CLOTH PART WAS RUINED.
MY CLOTHES, TOO!


HEH... DON'T PUSH IT, KID...
YEAH! I MIGHT EVEN BE STRONGER THAN YOU NOW, MASTER!

READ THIS WAY
WELL... HE ALWAYS WAS SPECIAL.
OH! HEY!
DID YOU HEAR? GAARA OF THE SAND IS KAZEKAGE!!
BOM
BOM
WOOSH
FOOSH
FOOSH
STRANGE EXPLOSIVES...
...PRECISION-GUIDED...

WHOOOOSH

WHIP
WHIP

FLIT..

POOF
POOF

THESE NEXT ONES ARE FAST, HMMM?!
SHWUP

READ THIS WAY
SKEEET
LA SH
KA BOOM
EEAGH

SLI
!!
THER
HE SHIELDED HIMSELF
...LIKE A PROTECTIVE EGGSHELL.
WHOOOOSH...
...!
SABAKURO! SAND PRISON!!
LOSE

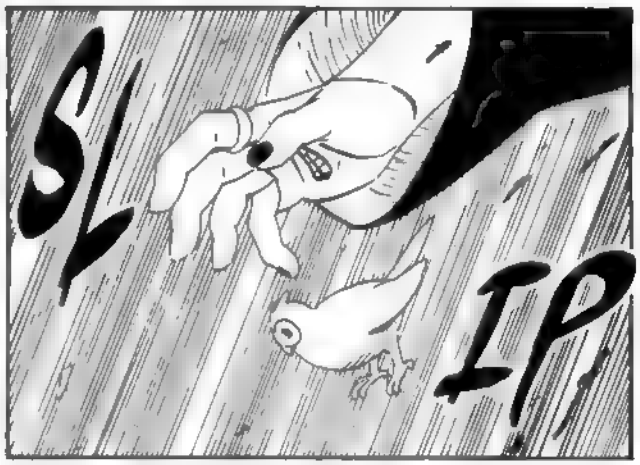
BLA
ST
THIS IS NOT GOOD...
RO
SH
POP...
!
SWI-SH

SPL
AT
!!
THE COFFIN OF CRUSHING SAND!
GENJI!
GR
USH..

NARUTO

Number 249:

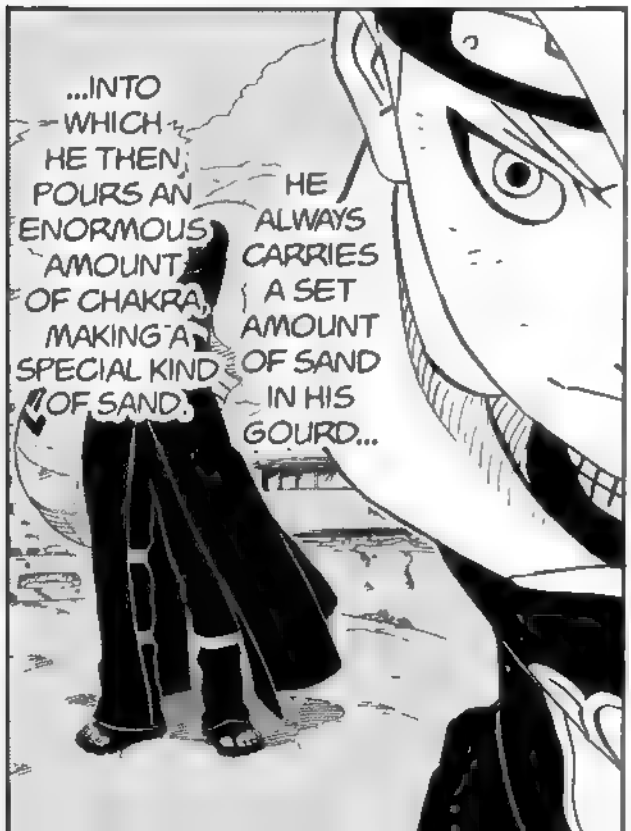
The Kazekage Stands Tall...!!

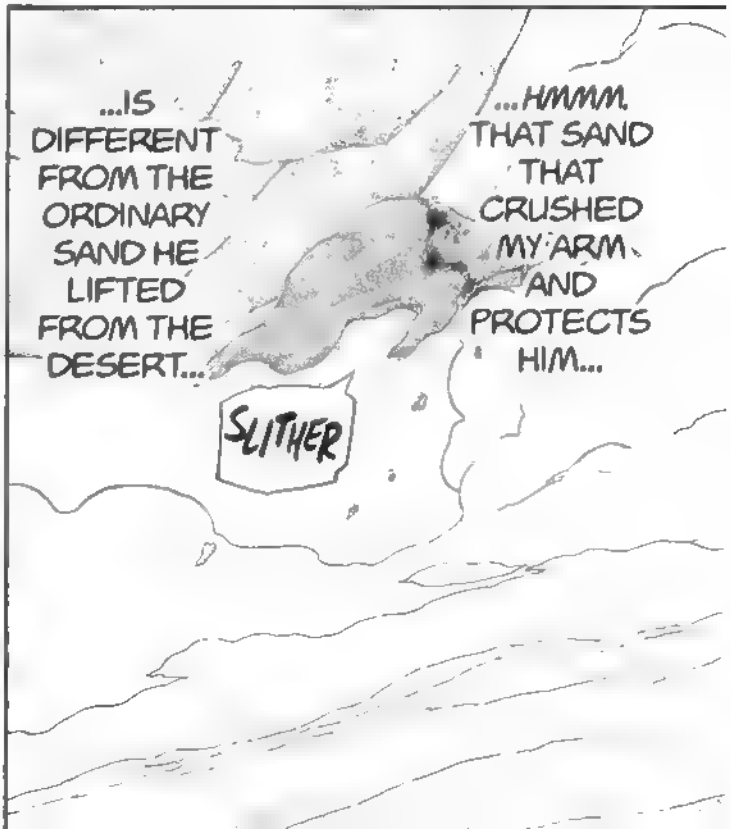


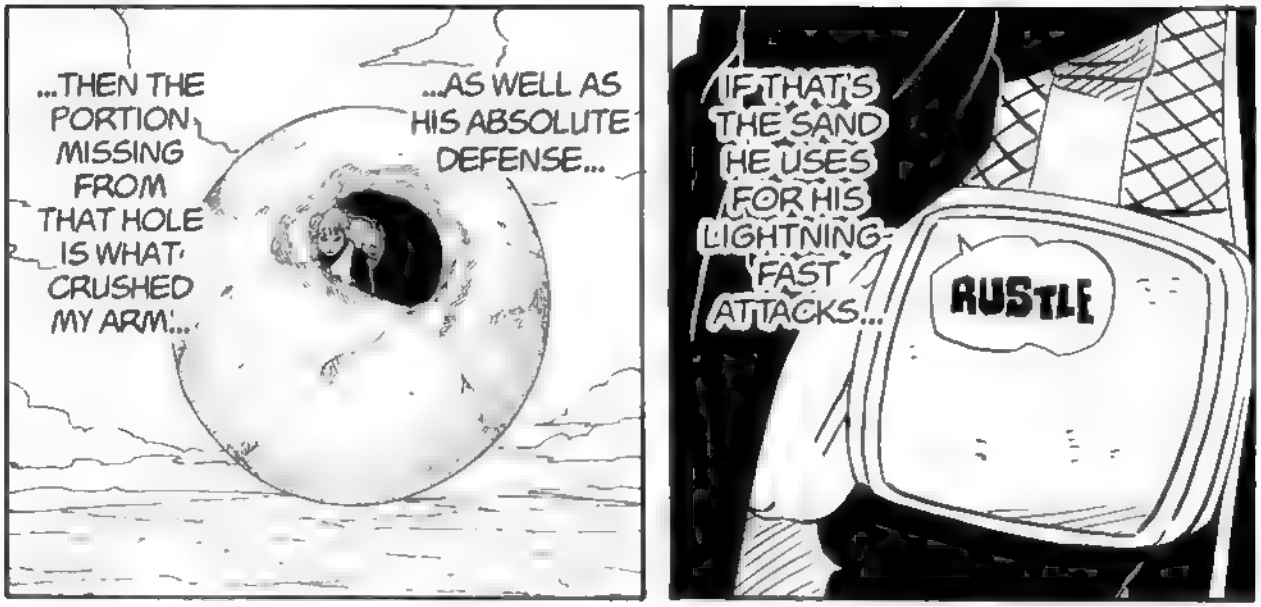
YA
NK

...BUT I'M ALMOST OUT OF CLAY... ONLY HAVE ENOUGH FOR ONE MORE ATTACK...
HE'S GOOD, HMMM ?!"
RUSTLE

WHOOSH...

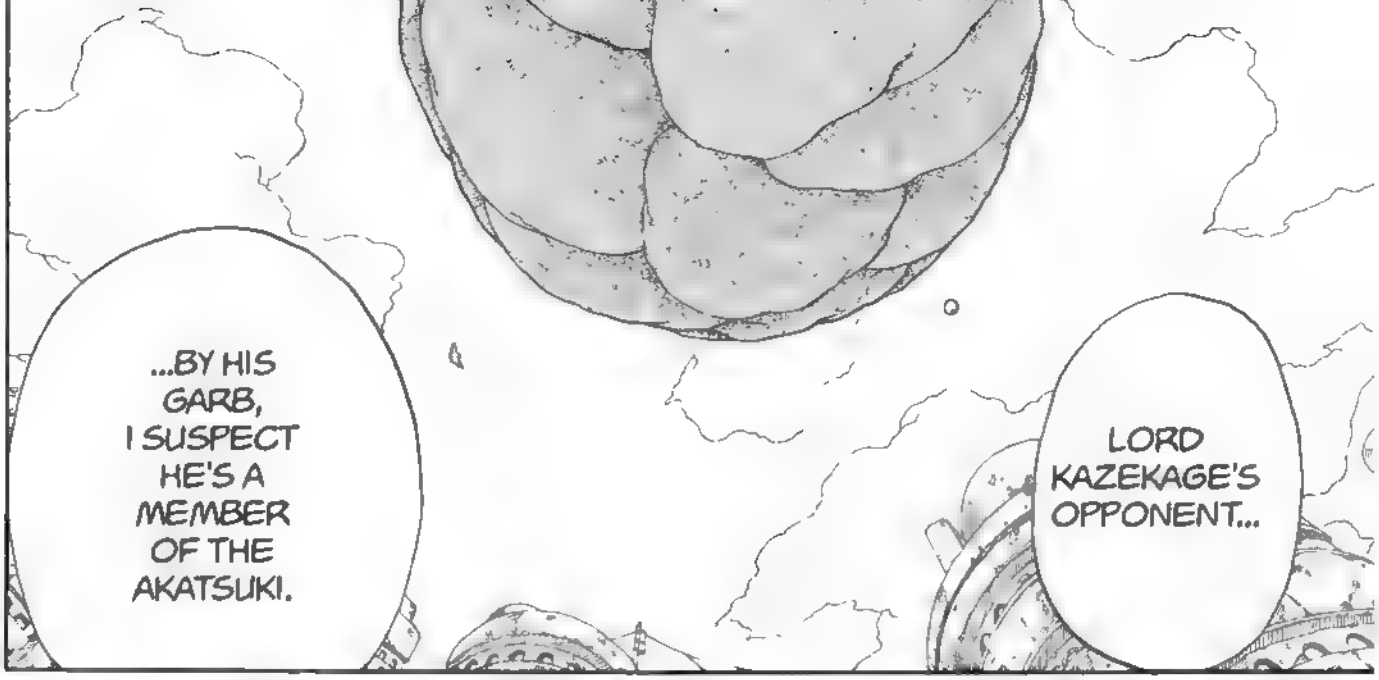

...INTO WHICH HE THEN POURS AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF CHAKRA, MAKING A SPECIAL KIND OF SAND.
HE ALWAYS CARRIES A SET AMOUNT OF SAND IN HIS GOURD...


...IS DIFFERENT FROM THE ORDINARY SAND HE LIFTED FROM THE DESERT...
...HMMM. THAT SAND THAT CRUSHED MY ARM AND PROTECTS HIM...
SLITHER


...THEN THE PORTION MISSING FROM THAT HOLE IS WHAT CRUSHED MY ARM...
...AS WELL AS HIS ABSOLUTE DEFENSE...
IF THAT'S THE SAND HE USES FOR HIS LIGHTNING-FAST ATTACKS...
RUSTLE

HOIST...
...MY OHAKO CAN EXPLOIT IT...

...


...BY HIS GARB, I SUSPECT HE'S A MEMBER OF THE AKATSUKI.
LORD KAZEKAGE'S OPPONENT...

MEDICAL CORPS, ERECT A SHIELD AND EVACUATE ALL NON-COMBATANTS WITHIN!
PREPARE FOR BATTLE, NOW!
WE MUST COVER LORD KAZEKAGE!

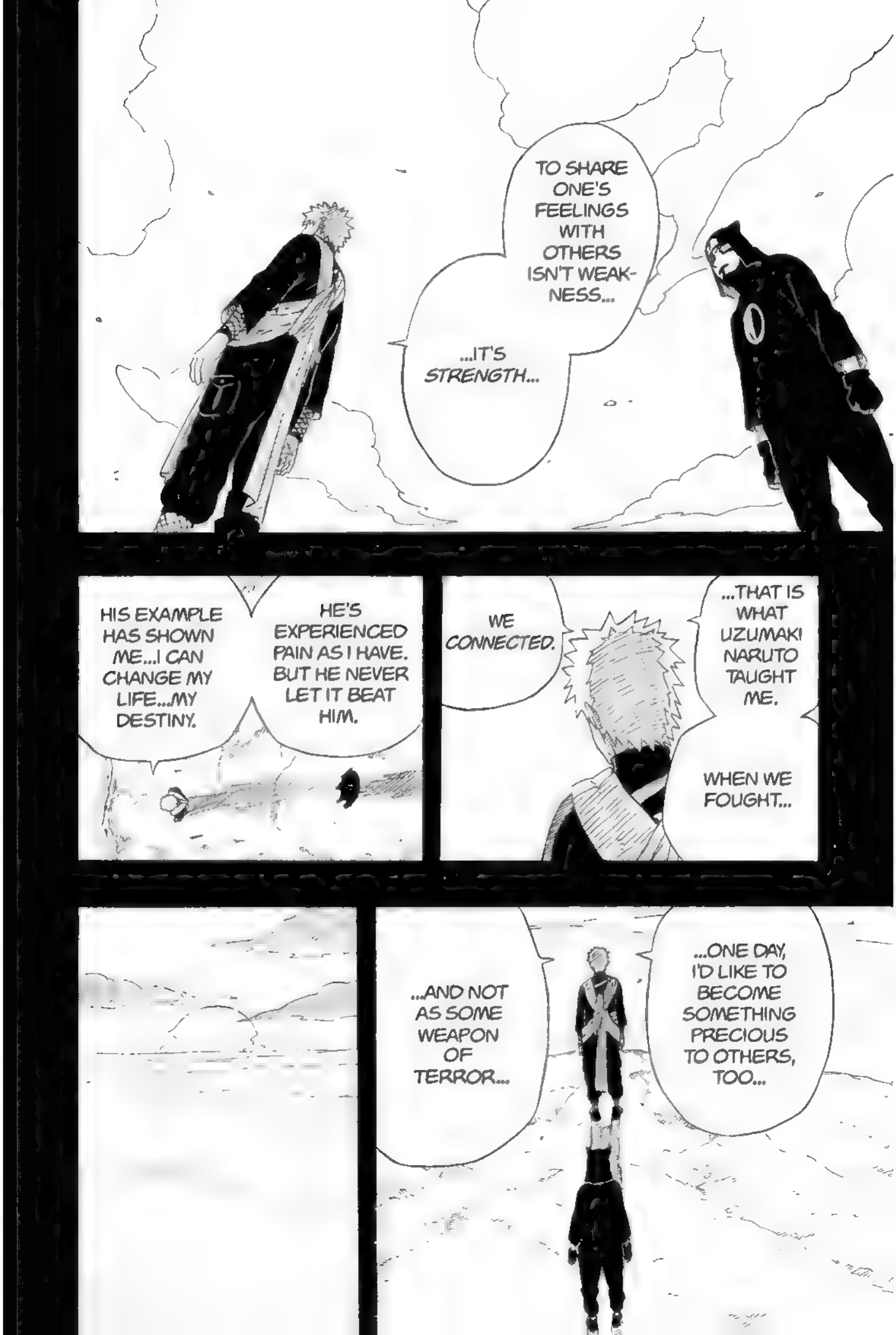
I THOUGHT SO...

YES, SIR!

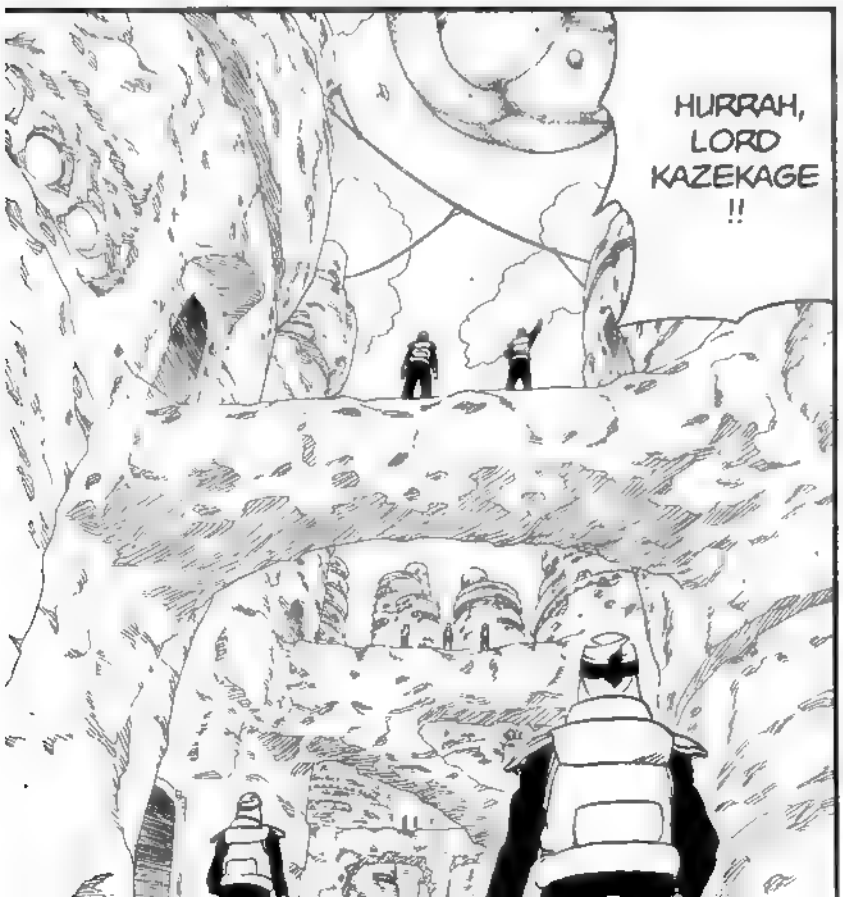
...
SIR?
KANKURO...
...AND HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN IN CASE SHUKAKU EMERGES.
WE MUST CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF GAARA GOING FERAL...
...GAARA WOULDN'T HURT ANY VILLAGERS...
COME ON, NO WAY...

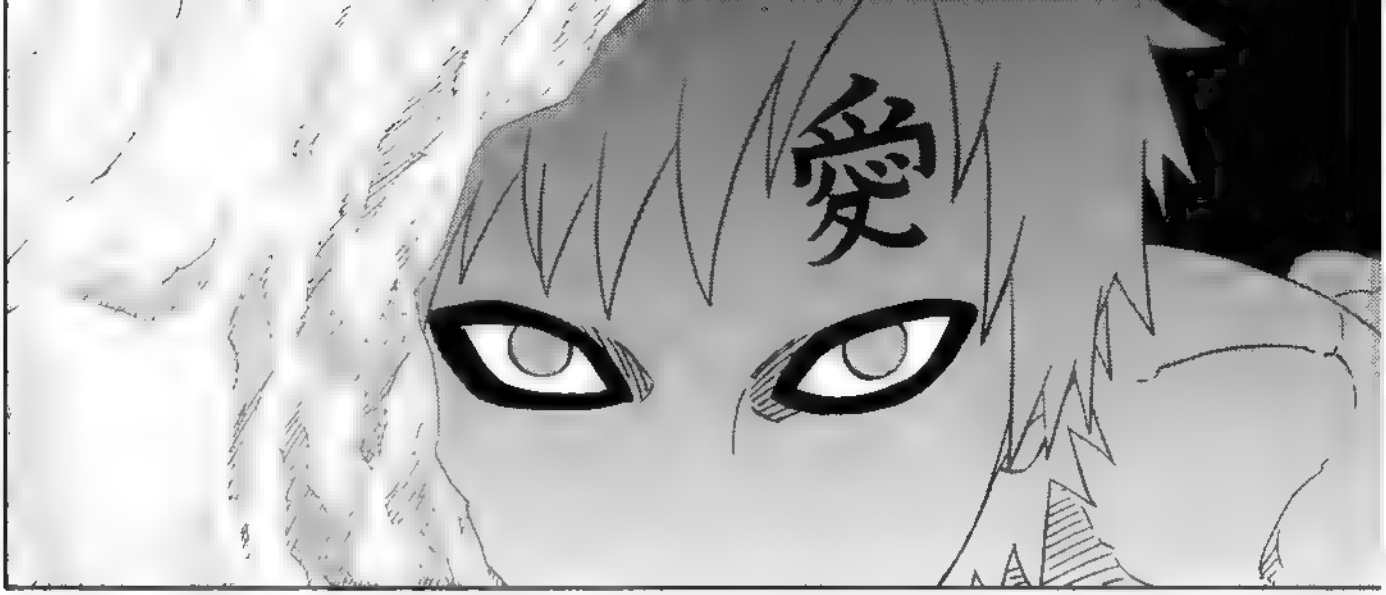
...YOU'RE NO MORE THAN A WEAPON OF MASS TERROR TO THE VILLAGE.
I DON'T REALLY WANT TO SAY THIS, BUT...
...
IT'S FULL OF JÔNIN WHO THINK POORLY OF YOU...
...AND MOST OF THE VILLAGE FEARS YOU, TOO...
FOR YOU TO SPLIT OFF FROM US NOW AND ENTER THE REGULAR TROOPS... IT'LL ONLY BE HARDER ON YOU.
I MUST CLEAR MY OWN PATH.
I KNOW WHAT I MUST DO, KANKURO.
I DON'T CARE...
...DOING NOTHING WILL ONLY BRING EVEN GREATER PAIN.
PERHAPS THEN... SOMEDAY... I CAN BE LIKE HIM...

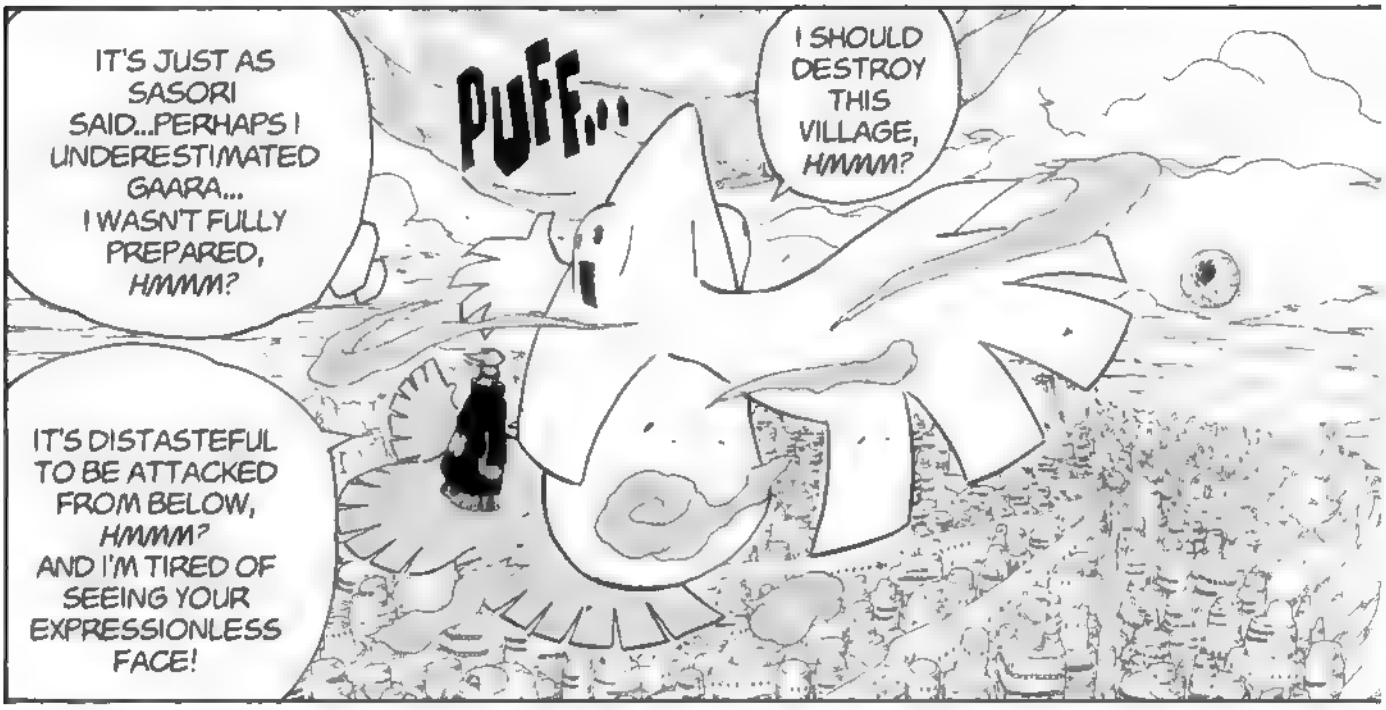
...
GAARA...
I WILL CONNECT TO THE PEOPLE OF THIS VILLAGE... AND SURVIVE.
I WILL AIM FOR THE TITLE OF KAZEKAGE, AS A SHINOBI OF THE SAND.
BUT HE KEPT ASKING...KEPT PUSHING ME...
...TO RE-DEFINE THOSE TIES...
UNTIL I MET HIM, TIES TO OTHERS...
...ONLY EVER BROUGHT ME PAIN AND SORROW.
...THAT'S WHAT I DECIDED AFTER WATCHING UZUMAKI NARUTO.
I WANT TO WORK HARD...AND BECOME SOMEONE OTHERS ACKNOWLEDGE AND RESPECT...
...
...I THINK I'M BEGINNING TO UNDER-STAND WHY.
AND NOW, FINALLY...

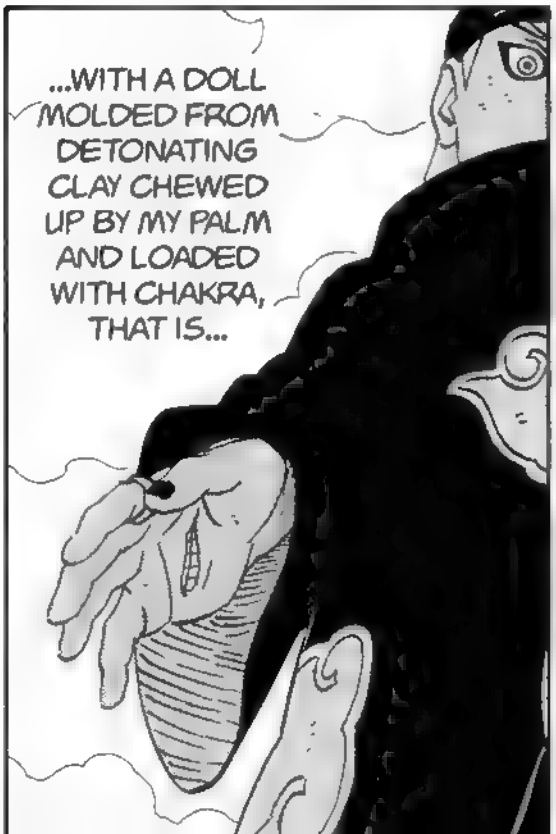

TO SHARE ONE'S FEELINGS WITH OTHERS ISN'T WEAK-NESS...
...IT'S STRENGTH...
HIS EXAMPLE HAS SHOWN ME...I CAN CHANGE MY LIFE...MY DESTINY.
HE'S EXPERIENCED PAIN AS I HAVE. BUT HE NEVER LET IT BEAT HIM.
WE CONNECTED.
...THAT IS WHAT UZUMAKI NARUTO TAUGHT ME.
WHEN WE FOUGHT...
...AND NOT AS SOME WEAPON OF TERROR...
...ONE DAY, I'D LIKE TO BECOME SOMETHING PRECIOUS TO OTHERS, TOO...

...BUT AS KAZEKAGE.

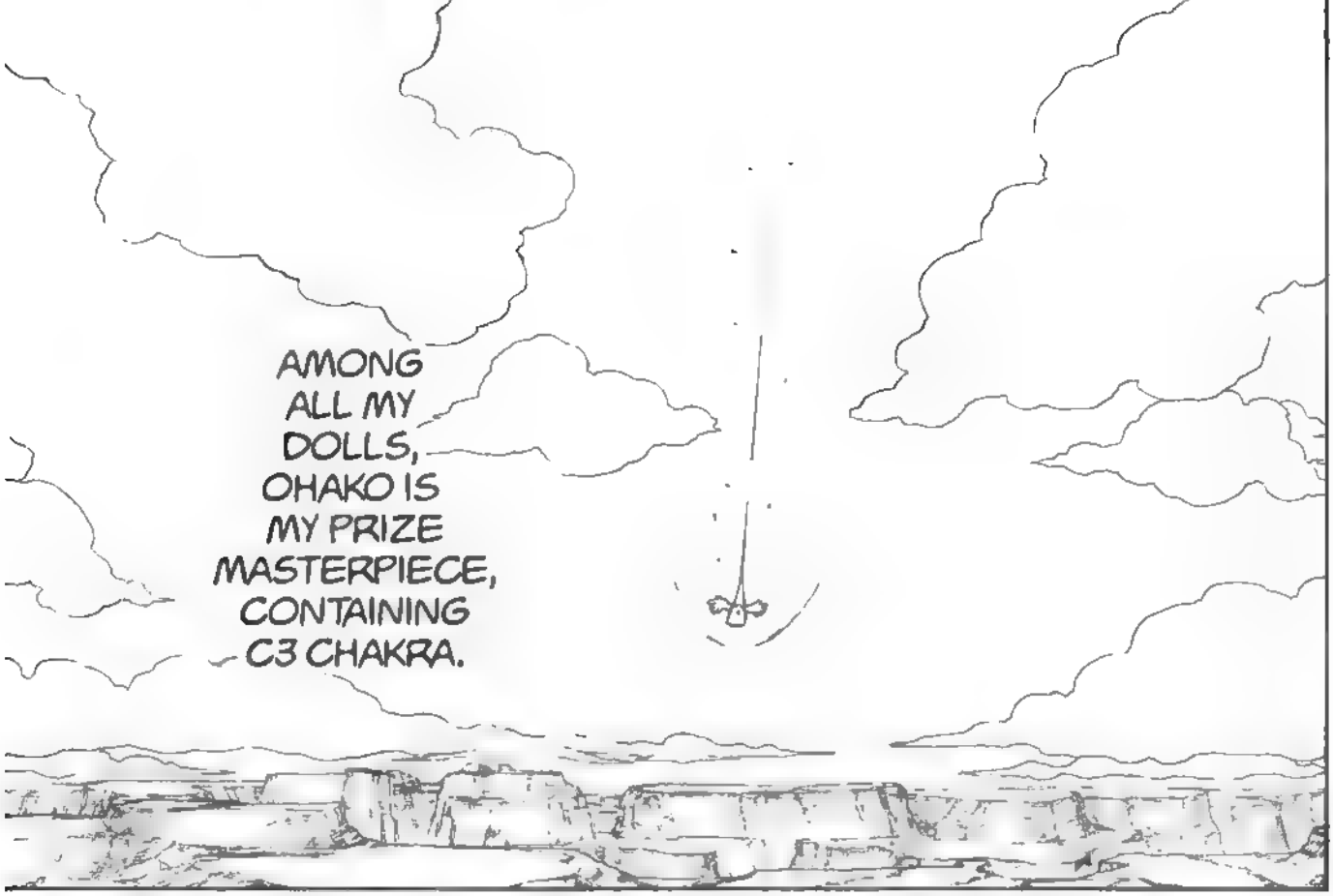

HURRAH, LORD KAZEKAGE !!


愛


IT'S JUST AS SASORI SAID...PERHAPS I UNDERESTIMATED GAARA... I WASN'T FULLY PREPARED, HMMM?
PUFF...
I SHOULD DESTROY THIS VILLAGE, HMMM?
IT'S DISTASTEFUL TO BE ATTACKED FROM BELOW, HMMM? AND I'M TIRED OF SEEING YOUR EXPRESSIONLESS FACE!


...WITH A DOLL MOLDED FROM DETONATING CLAY CHEWED UP BY MY PALM AND LOADED WITH CHAKRA, THAT IS...

FUUOOOO


AMONG ALL MY DOLLS, OHAKO IS MY PRIZE MASTERPIECE, CONTAINING C3 CHAKRA.

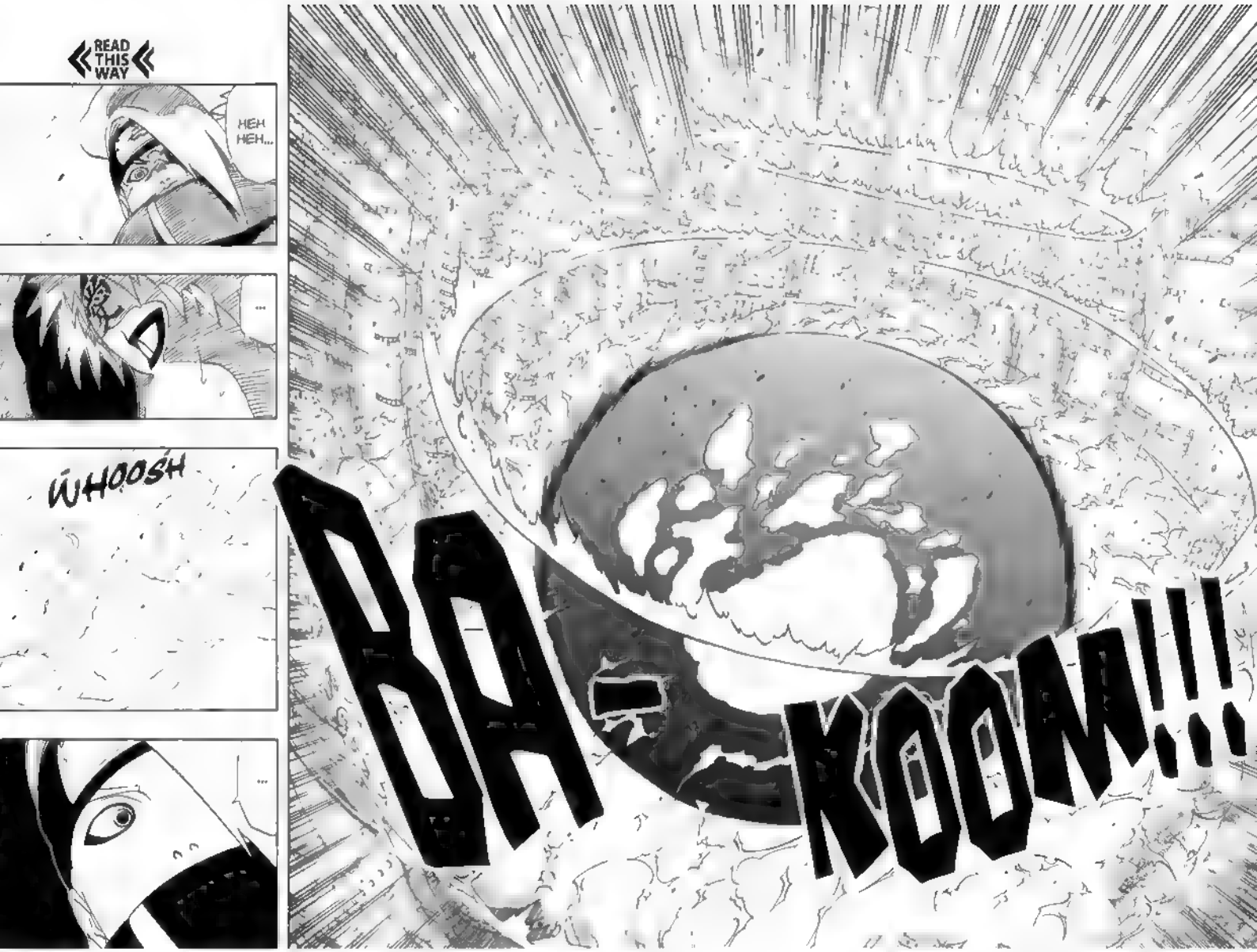
WHAT IS THAT?

...!

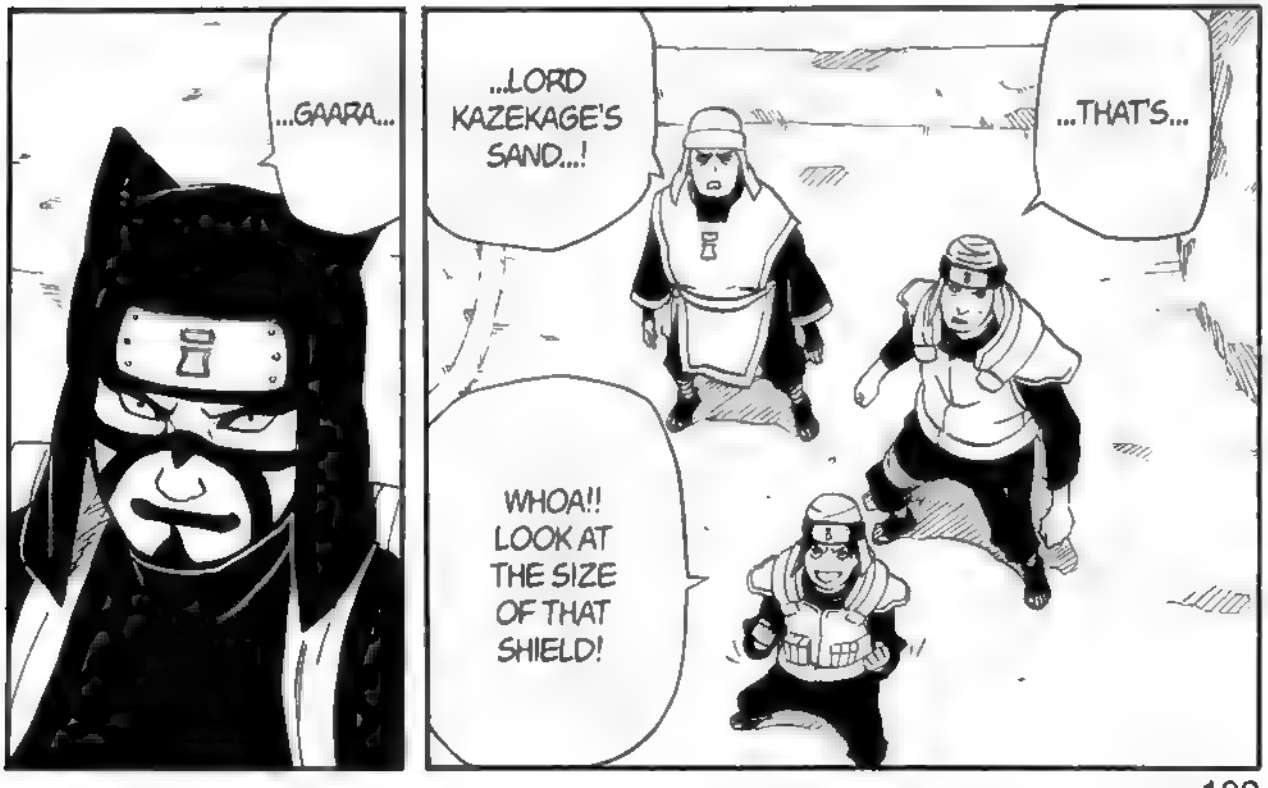
!!

TOO LATE!

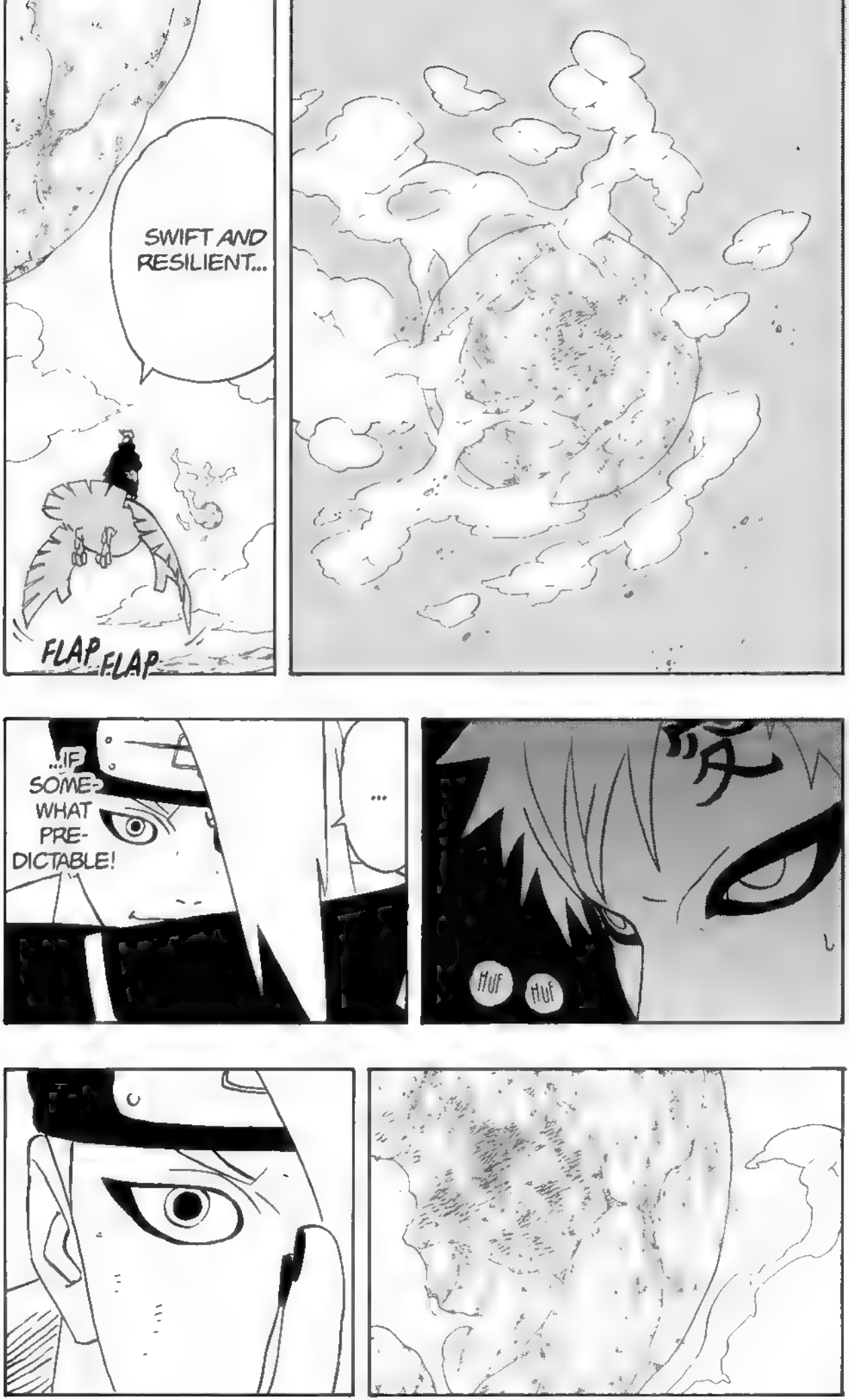
NOT GOOD. RUN !!

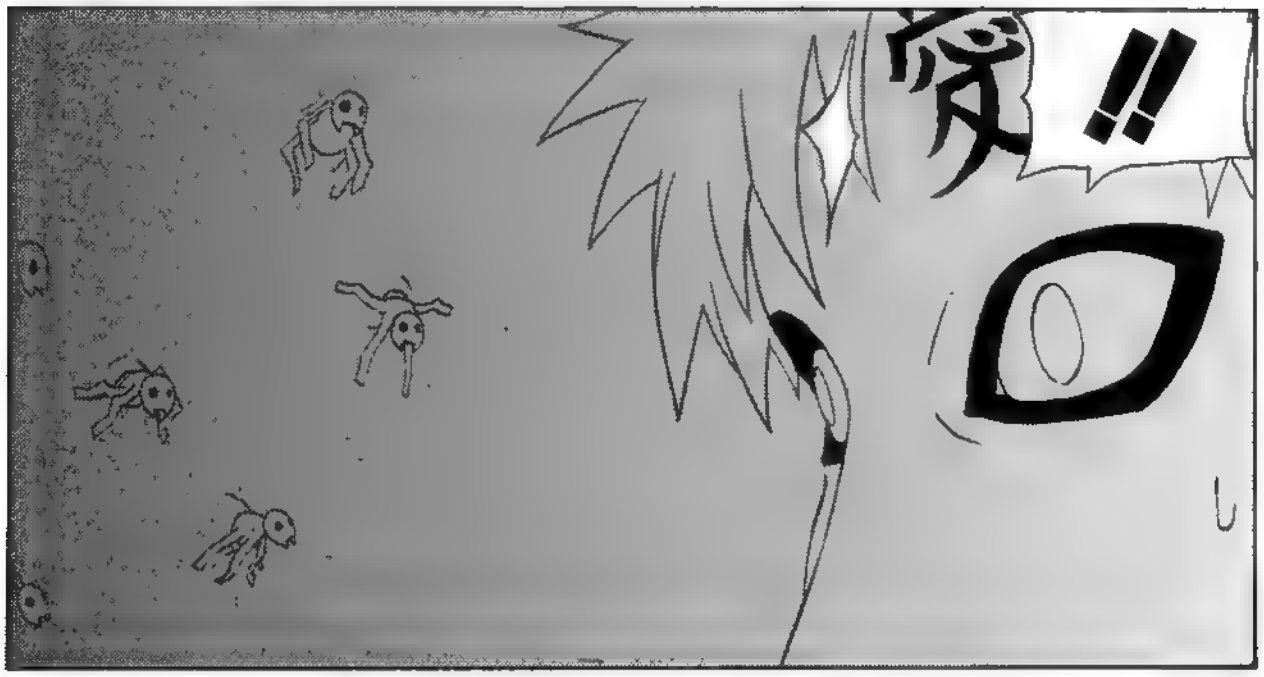

READ THIS WAY
HEH HEH...
...
WHOOSH
...
BA-KOOM!!!

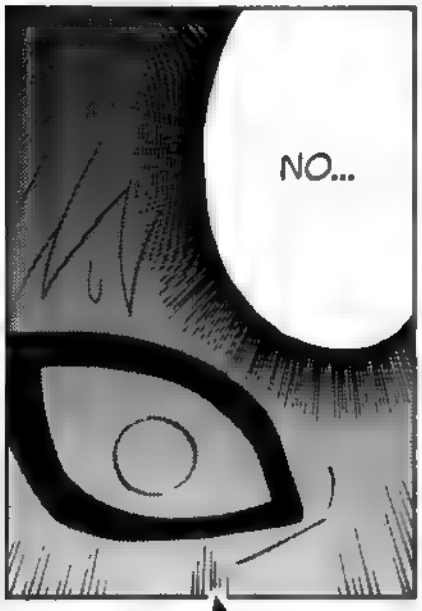
BILLOW...
BILLOW...


...GAARA...
...LORD KAZEKAGE'S SAND...!
...THAT'S...
WHOA!! LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THAT SHIELD!

NOW YOU'RE IN RANGE, HMMM!
GRRR
HUF
HUF
KA-
BOOM!
YEEAGH


SWIFT AND RESILIENT...
FLAP FLAP
...IF SOME-WHAT PRE-DICTABLE!
...
Huf
Huf


!!


NO...

YES!!

SHUDDER

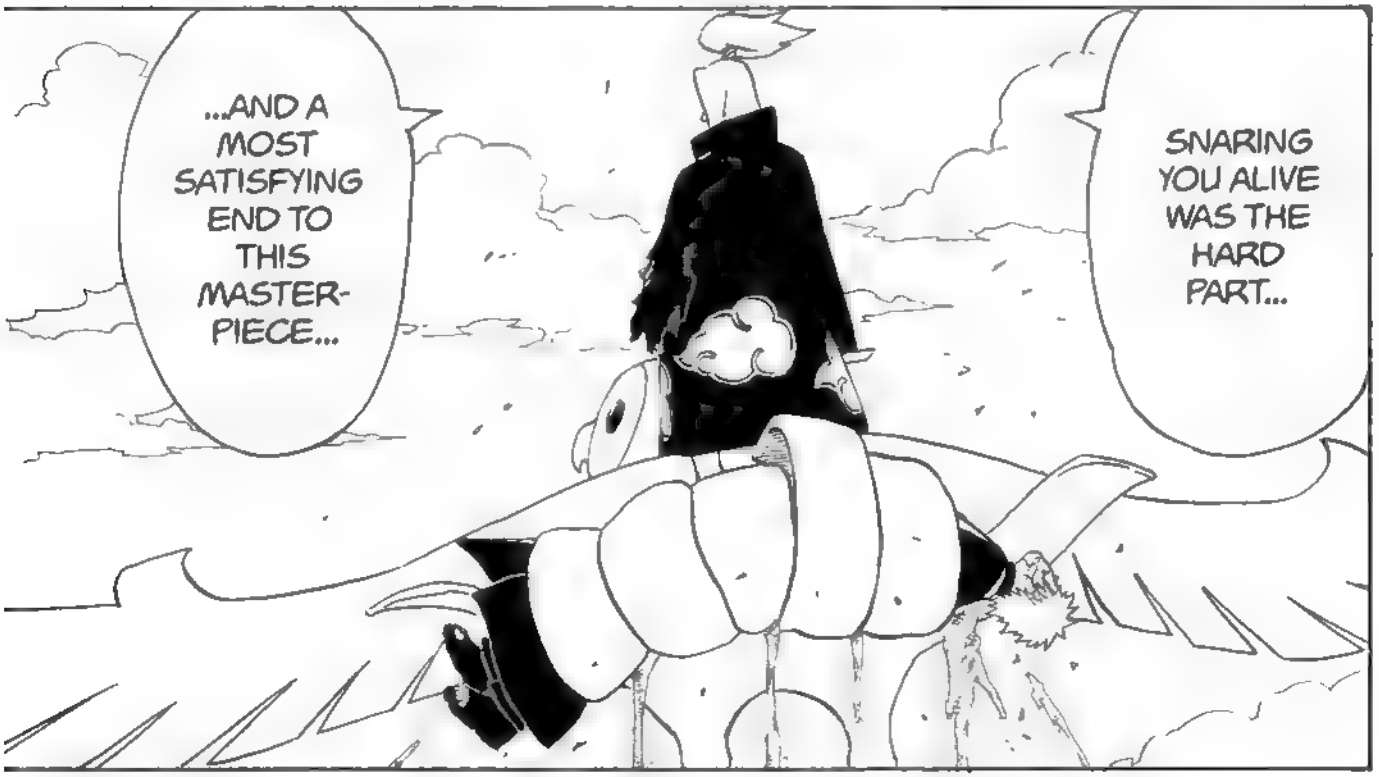
GR
USH...!!
THAT'S HOW I WAS ABLE TO PUT YOUR GREAT DEFENSE TO USE...
HEH HEH...YOUR SAND MAY HAVE CRUSHED MY LEFT ARM, BUT NOT BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO CHEW SOME OF IT AND INFUSE THE GRAINS WITH DETONATING CLAY.

SO I DROPPED OHAKO ON THE VILLAGE...
...I NEEDED TO DISTRACT YOU FIRST BEFORE SPRINGING MY TRAP.
BUT SINCE I ONLY HAD ONE ATTACK LEFT...
SCATTER...

I KNEW A CLOSE-RANGE EXPLOSION WOULD TRIGGER YOUR PERSONAL SAND SHIELD...
...AS PART OF MY OFFENSIVE...
SCATTER...

SLITHER...
HO HO... LEAVE IT TO YOU, KAZEKAGE... USING THE LAST OF YOUR STRENGTH TO RETURN THE SAND OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE...
...WHEN IT'D BE SO MUCH EASIER JUST TO DUMP IT ON 'EM.

...
G... GAARA ?!
SHOOM


...AND A MOST SATISFYING END TO THIS MASTER-PIECE...
SNARING YOU ALIVE WAS THE HARD PART...

NARUTO

Number 250:

New Squad, First Mission!!

HEH HEH ...
WHISK...
HE WAS AFTER GAARA ALL ALONG! GAH!!
ZOOM
!
GNASH.
HE'S TAKING HIM ALIVE?!

READ THIS WAY
I CAN'T JUST STAND AROUND AND DO NOTHING!!
!
HE'S POWERFUL ENOUGH TO TAKE DOWN GAARA!
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'LL ACCOM-PLISH?!!
KANKURO! WAIT!
I'LL TRY!!
ALL RIGHT ...!
WHIRL
IF WE CAN PIN DOWN THEIR HIDEOUT, WE CAN RALLY THE TROOPS AND ATTACK!!
THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M SAYING!
BE SMART ABOUT THIS...TRACK HIM...DON'T TRY TO ATTACK!
SCREECH...
...GAH...!
ZOOM
KAN-KURO
!!
TSK...

SHOOM

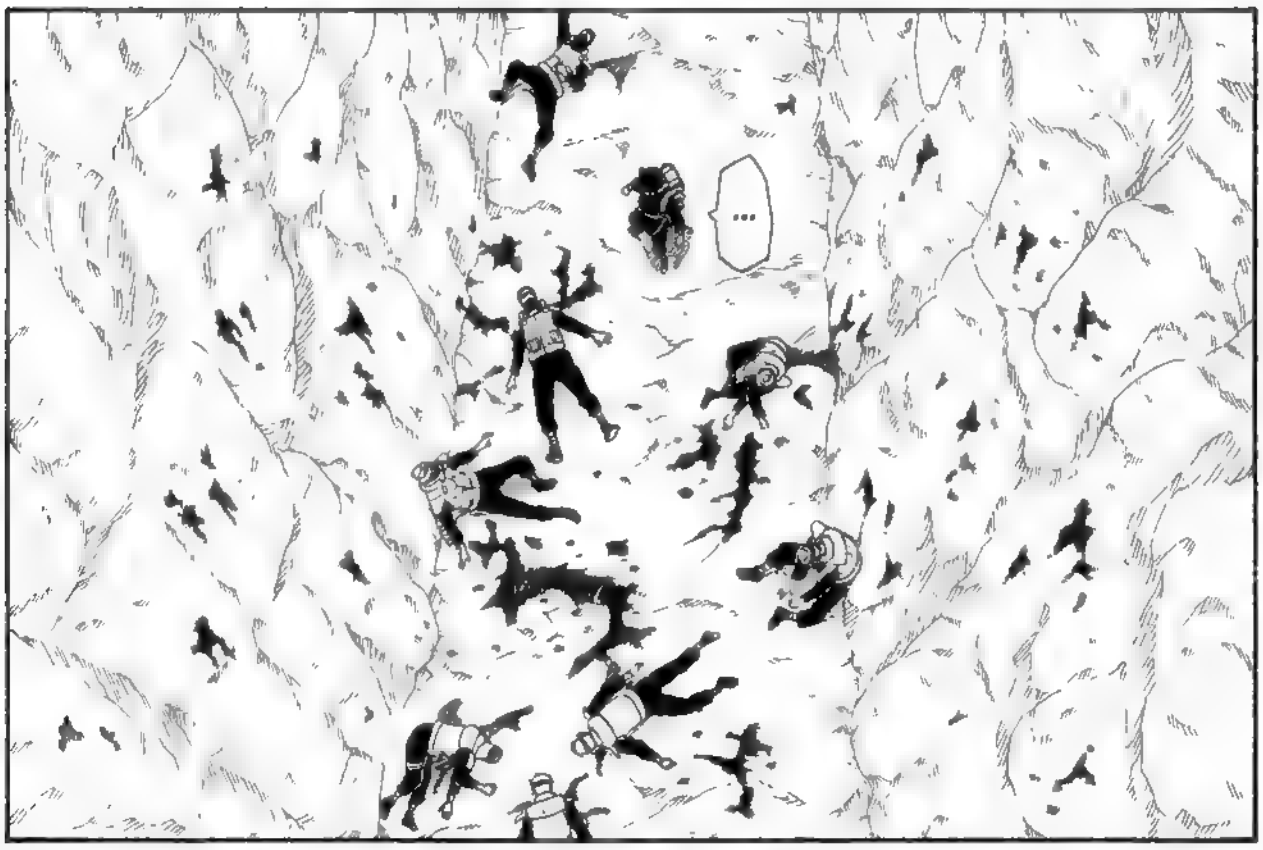
AND RELAY OUR SITUATION TO KONOHA NOW!
TELL THEM THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!
STOMP STOMP
DEPLOY A TRACKING UNIT AND HAVE THEM TAIL KANKURO!

SOMETHING'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN...
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS...

YES, SIR!
THUMP!

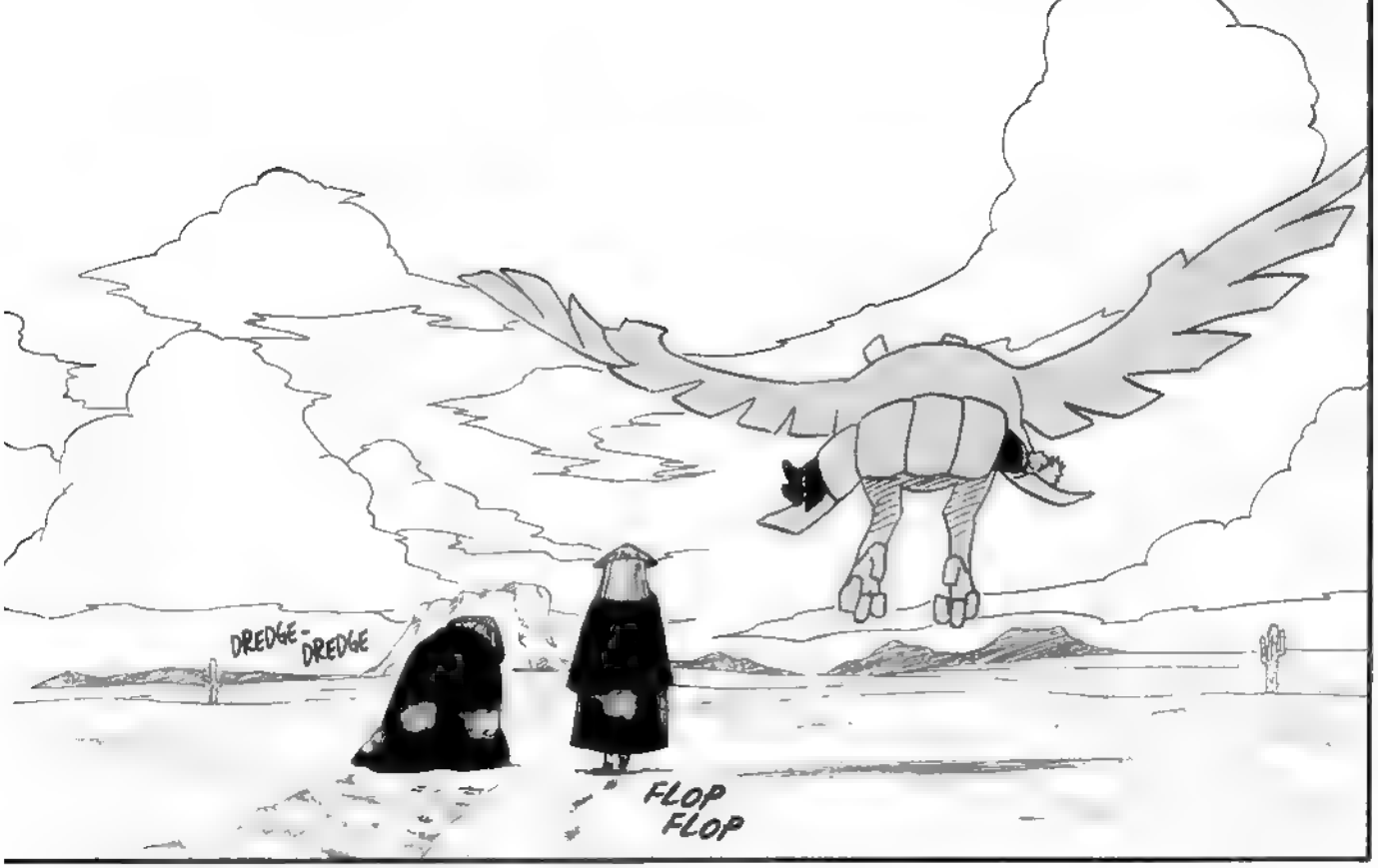
READ THIS WAY
HE'S LANDING ...?!
SKIM...
SPRING
FLAP!
YOU'RE LATE... I TOLD YOU, DON'T KEEP ME WAITING.
PERHAPS NEXT TIME YOU'LL LISTEN TO ME...
YOU WERE RIGHT. HE WAS RATHER STRONG. HMMM?

NO... THIS CAN'T BE...
...WH... WHAT...?!

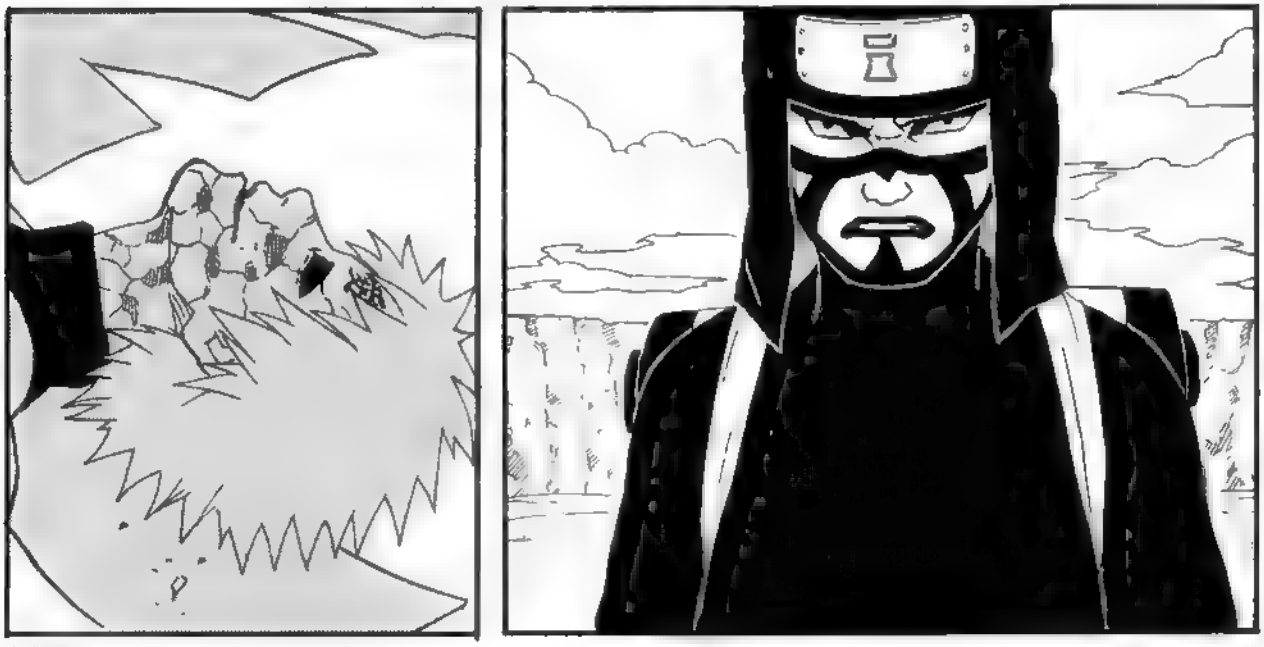

...

SHOOF

GRRR


DREDGE-
DREDGE
FLOP
FLOP

STOP!



I'M TAKING GAARA BACK!

!

DEIDARA... GO ON AHEAD.
...

?

SHF
SHF

THUNK

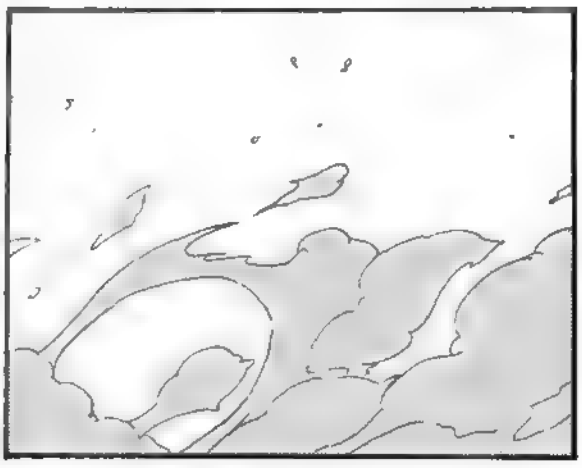
SLAP
(Scroll: Crow)
(Scroll: Salamander)
(Scroll: Ant)

BOOF

CLAP

...!

...

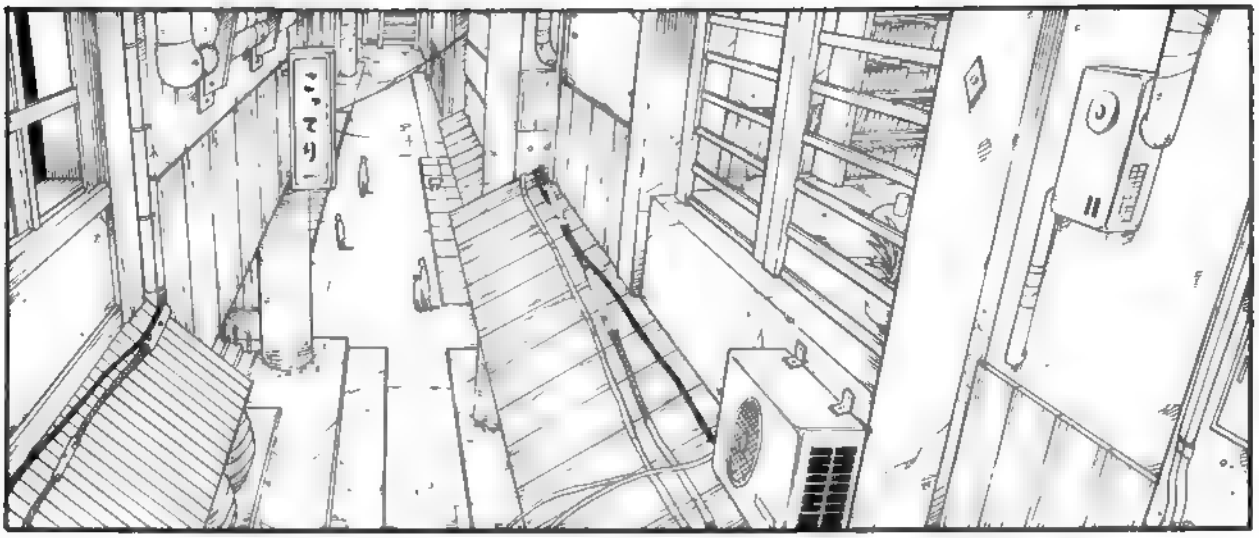


CLAKETA-
CLIKETA-
CLACK

CRACK
WOOSH

YOU'RE NOT GOING ANY-WHERE!
HEH... ENJOY THE SHOW...
TAP
PUPPET ARTS, HUH...

...I'LL MAKE THIS SHORT AND SWEET.
I DON'T LIKE TO WAIT OR KEEP OTHERS WAITING, SO...


ガラ

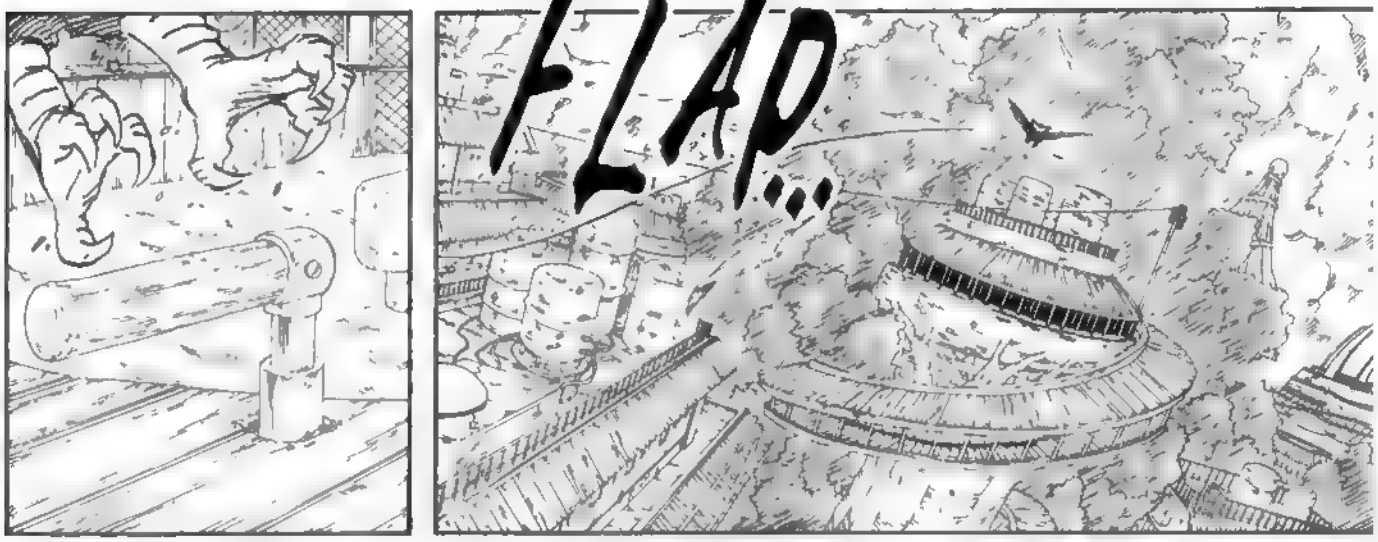
TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF OUR MISSION AS A NEW TEAM, YOU KNOW!
AND YOU'RE NOT EXCITED ?!!
MASTER KAKASHI! YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL!!

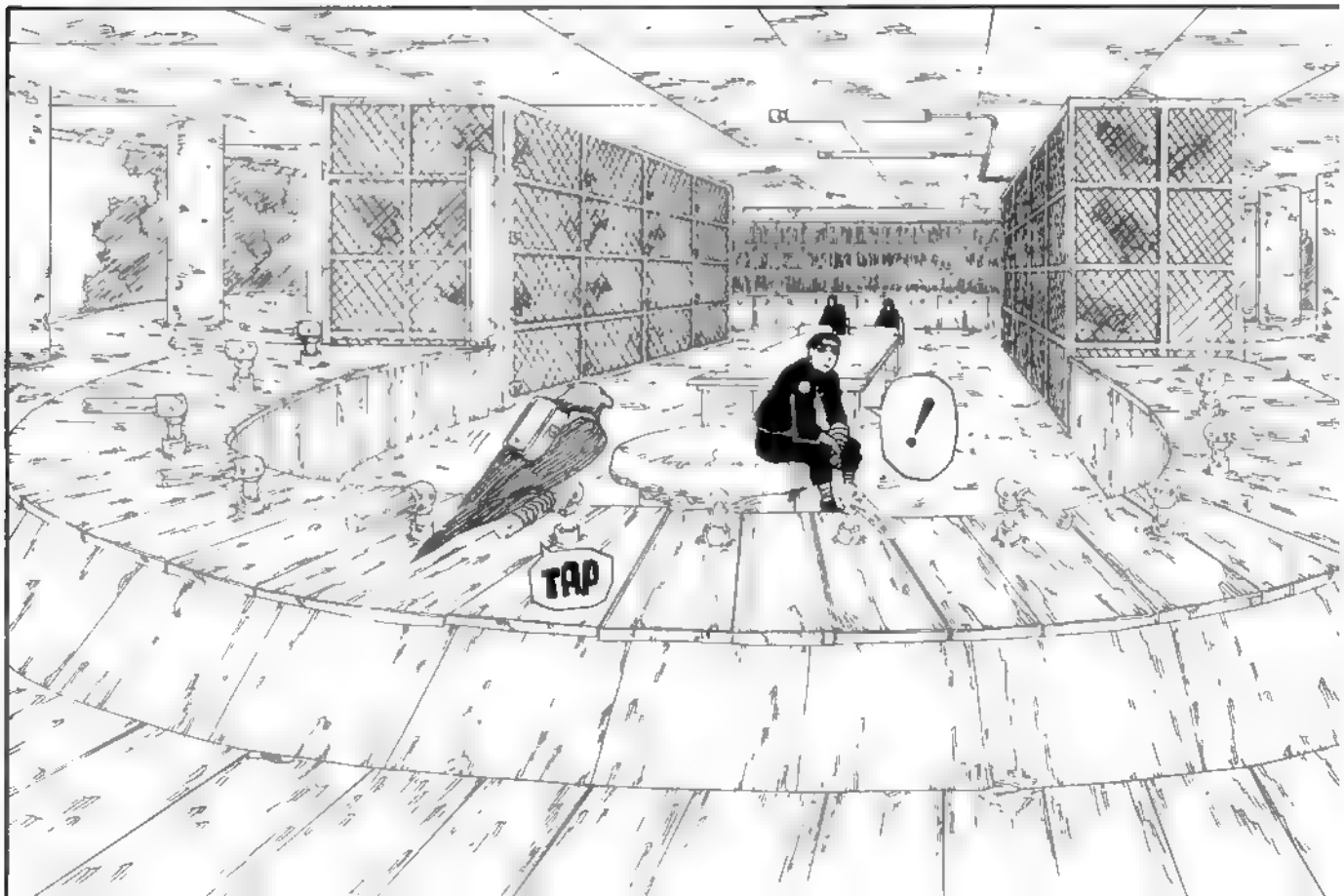
SORRY, I WAS PROCRAS-TINATING ON THE NEW TEAM'S PAPER-WORK...
YOU'RE LATE!

!

...
NOT SURE THAT WAS A COMPLI-MENT...

OH, LIKE YOU'RE ONE TO TALK, NARUTO!
SO WHAT IF HE'S A LITTLE LACKADAISI-CAL? THAT'S JUST WHO HE IS.


FLAP...

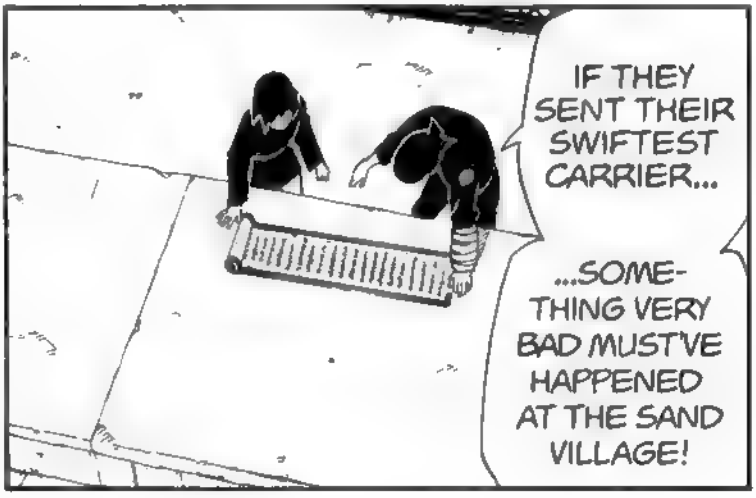

!
TAP

THAT'S SUNAGAKURE'S HAWK, TAKAMARU!
CLAMP
!!

FSSSH

TUMP
伝
CALL UP THE DECODERS NOW!

WHAT-EVER IT WAS...
...WE'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH!


IF THEY SENT THEIR SWIFTEST CARRIER...
...SOME-THING VERY BAD MUST'VE HAPPENED AT THE SAND VILLAGE!

(Banner: Everyone, Good Luck)

(Ceiling: Shinobi)

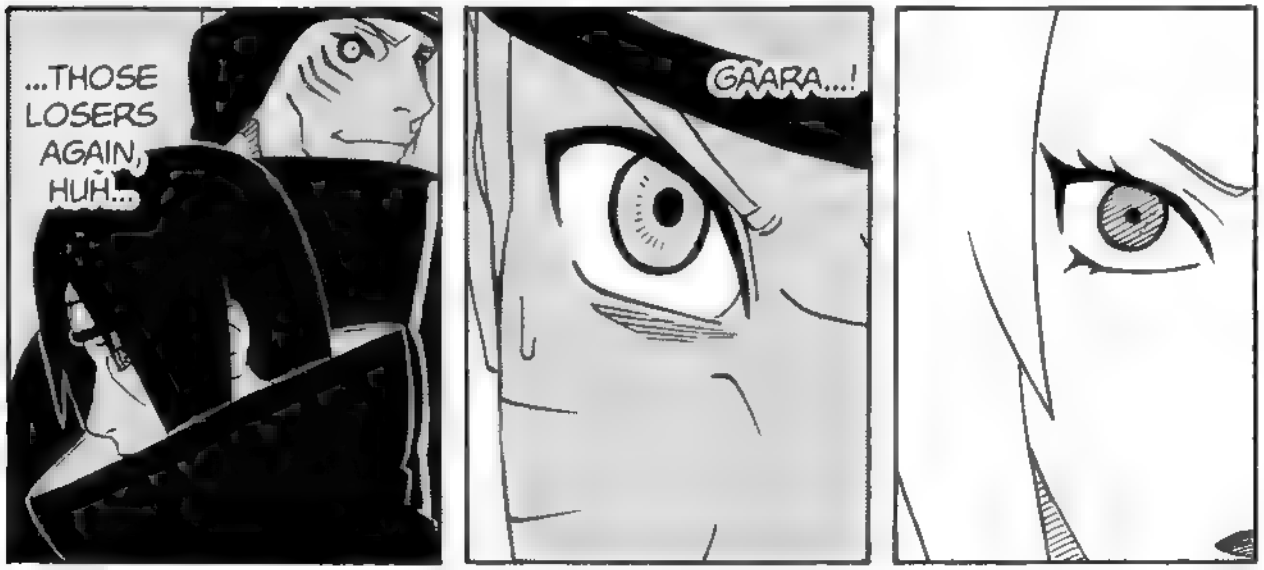
...IDIOT! YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW FEROCIOUS LADY TSUNADE CAN BE...!!!
INNER SAKURA
S...SO SORRY, MILADY!
I'LL SPEAK TO HIM LATER!
STUDIOUS
NARUTO... MENTALLY, YOU HAVEN'T MATURED AT ALL...
SIGH...

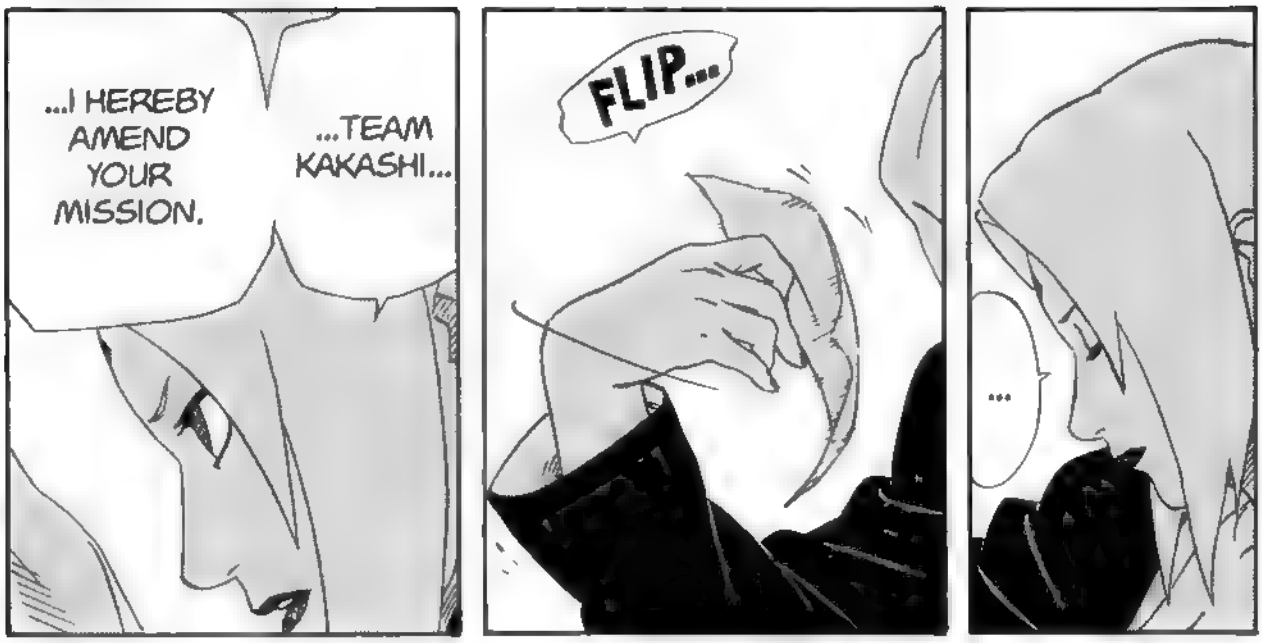
W...WILL YOU QUIT IT!
FOOSH
CHOKE
PUMMEL
EXCUSE ME...?!
WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?!
OLD MAN THIRD...HE REALLY KNEW HIS STUFF.

NOW WHAT?
T... TERRIBLE NEWS!
LADY FIFTH!!
SLAM

WE'VE JUST RECEIVED WORD THAT SAND'S KAZEKAGE...
...HAS BEEN KIDNAPPED BY A MEMBER OF THE AKATSUKI!

...!
...!
!
!!

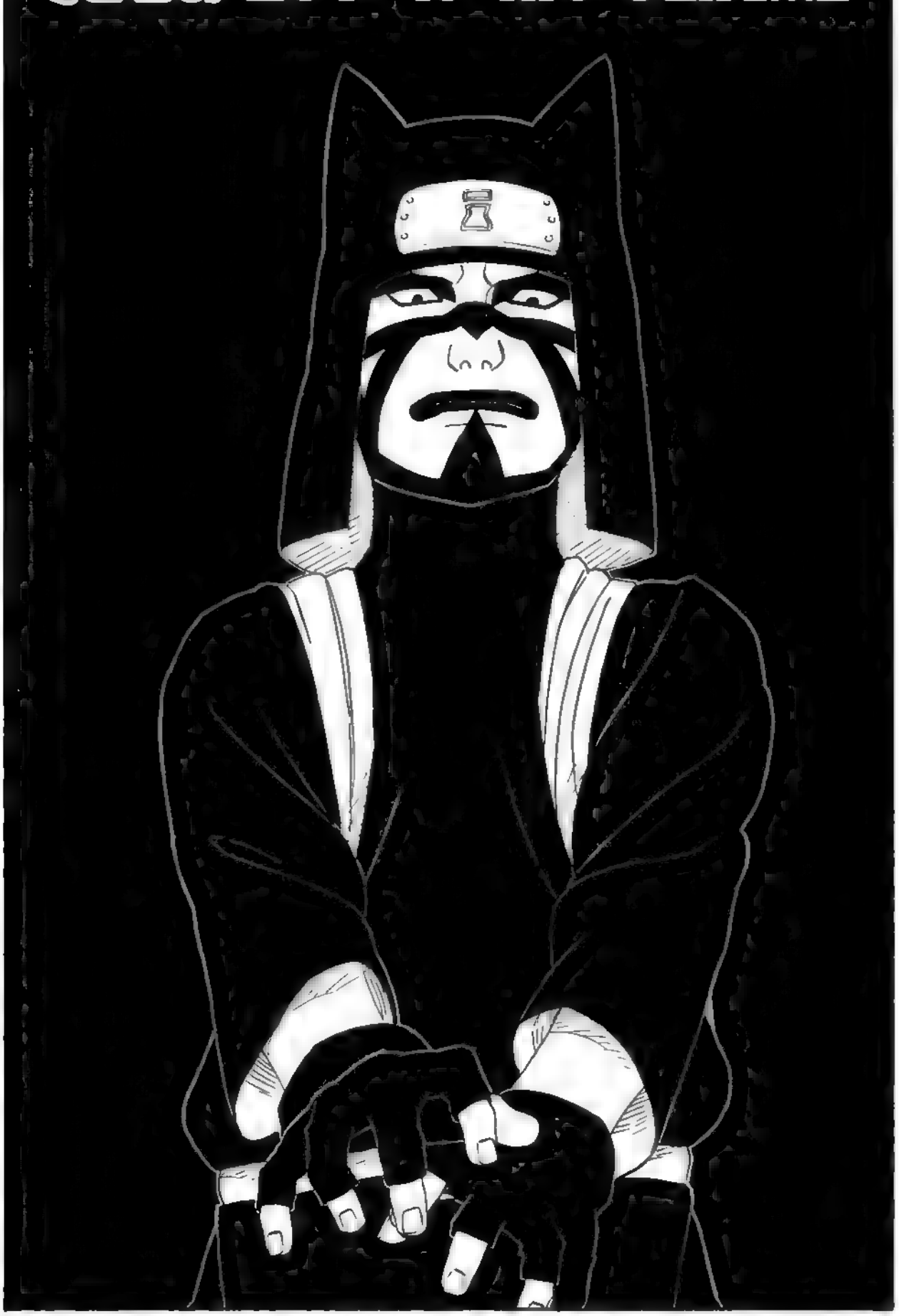

...THOSE LOSERS AGAIN, HUH...
GAARA...!


...I HEREBY AMEND YOUR MISSION.
...TEAM KAKASHI...
FLIP...
...

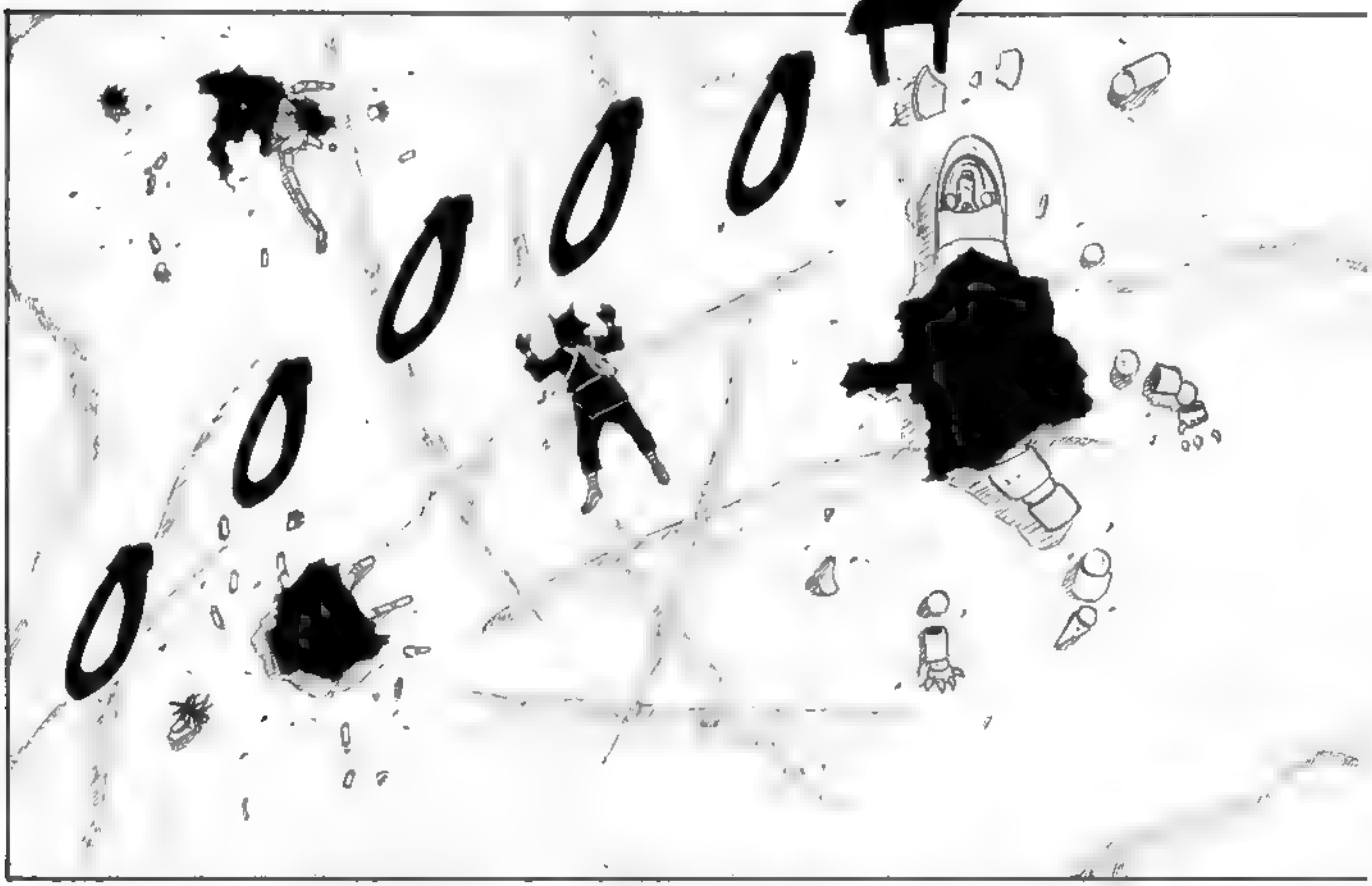
AFTERWARD, YOU WILL FOLLOW SAND'S ORDERS AND PROVIDE THEM WHATEVER ASSISTANCE THEY REQUIRE!
YOU WILL LEAVE FOR THE SAND NOW! ASSESS THE SITUATION AND REPORT BACK IMMEDIATELY!

NARUTO

Number 251: To the Sand...!!



FW


OOOOOH

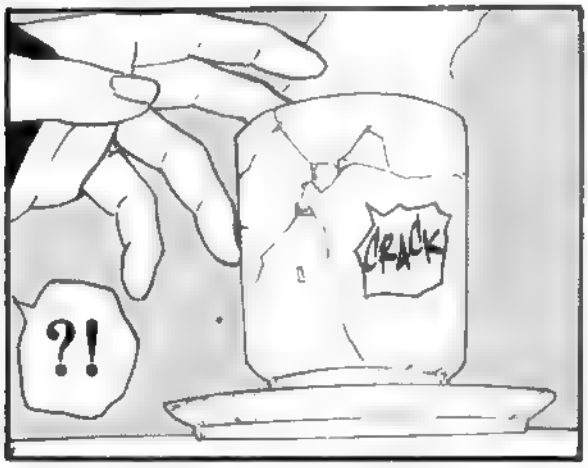
BODY'S STARTING TO TINGLE... DON'T TELL ME...
HE USES POISON, TOO...
TWITCH
GRR... UGH...
TWITCH

READ THIS WAY
HOW DID HE KNOW?!
NO ONE'S EVER SEEN THROUGH THE MECHANISMS THIS FULLY BEFORE...
OH, I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOUR POISON- AND WEAPON-RIGGED PUPPETS...
NICE TRY...BUT YOU CHOSE THE WRONG OPPONENT...
ELEMENTARY, BOY...YOU SEE, THE PUPPET MASTER WHO CREATED THE CROW, THE ANT, THE SALAMANDER...
HEH HEH...
BY THE LOOK ON YOUR FACE, I CAN TELL WHAT YOU'RE THINKING... *HOW* DID HE KNOW...?!
?!
...IS NONE OTHER THAN I, THE ONE PULLING THEIR STRINGS!

...SASORI OF THE RED SAND?!
...YOU... YOU'RE THE ONE...
...YOU BUILT THE PUPPET CORPS...
I MUST SAY, THOUGH... THIS WAS A RATHER ENTERTAINING DIVERSION...
...FIGHTING A JUNIOR VERSION OF MYSELF WITH MY OWN HAND-ME-DOWNS.
...SO WHY RETURN NOW?!
YOU DESERTED THE SAND 20 YEARS AGO...
...THAT MY NAME IS KNOWN EVEN TO THOSE YOUR AGE.
WHAT AN HONOR...
WHAT'S THE POINT OF ASKING, WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT TO DIE?
FSSH

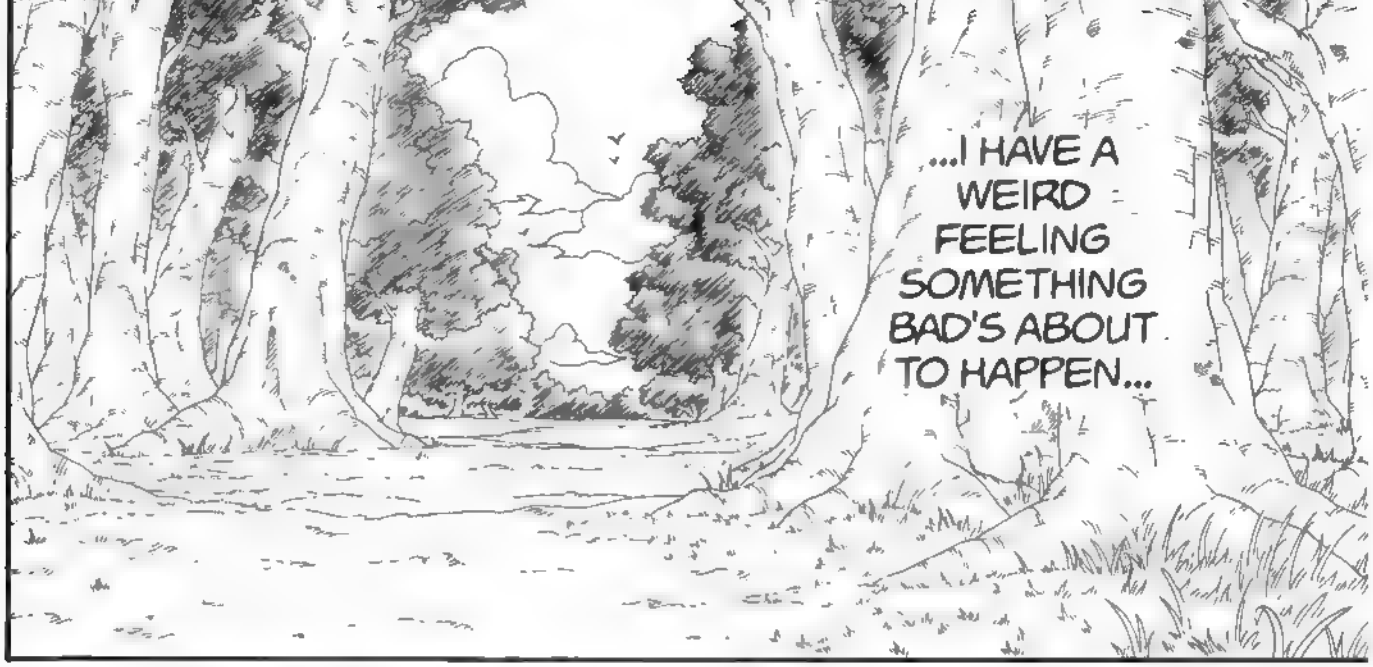
CHIRP
CHIRP
茶
だんご

REACH


CRACK
?!

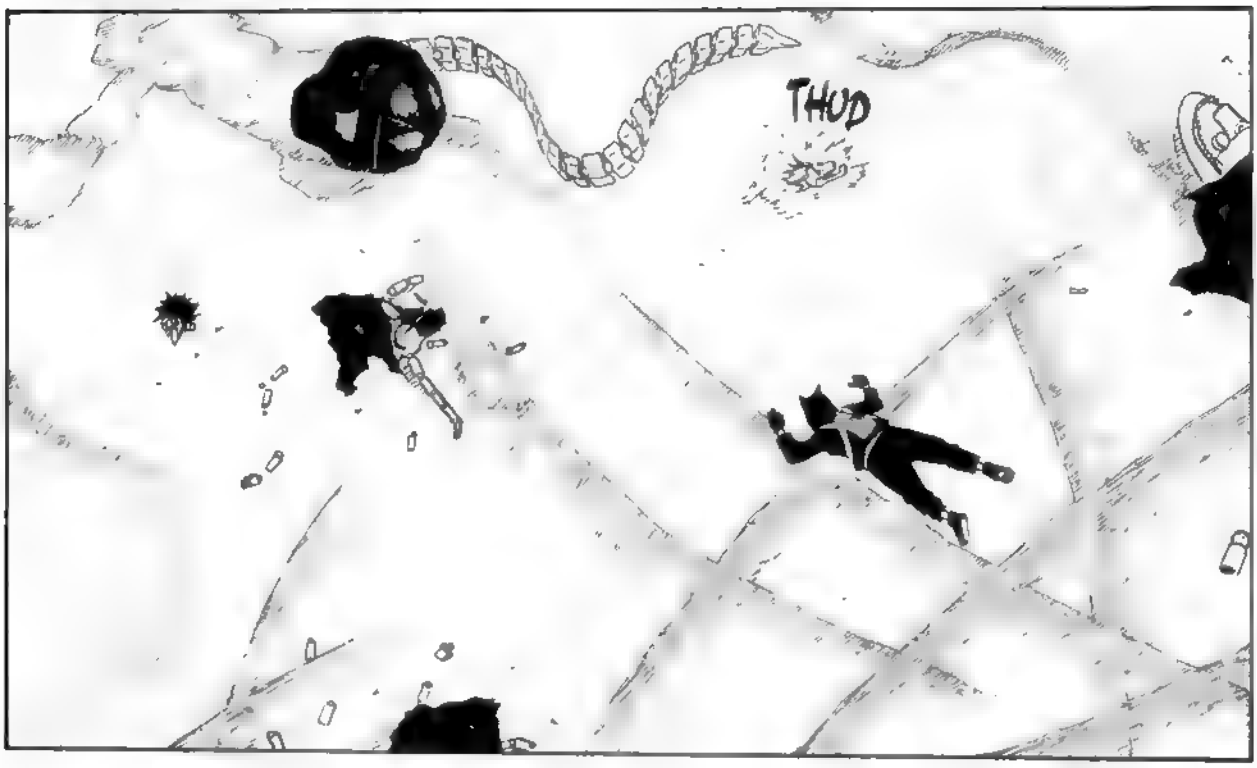
...I AM NOT SUPER-STITIOUS, BUT...

...


...I HAVE A WEIRD FEELING SOMETHING BAD'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN...

TWITCH...
LA
SH

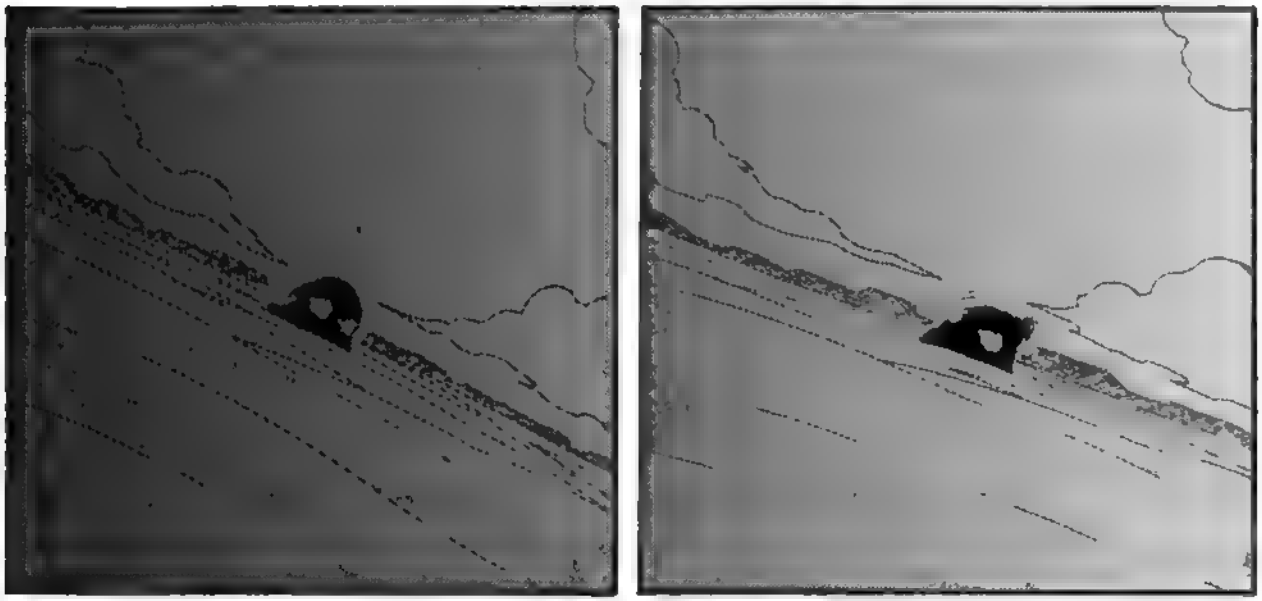
!
BA

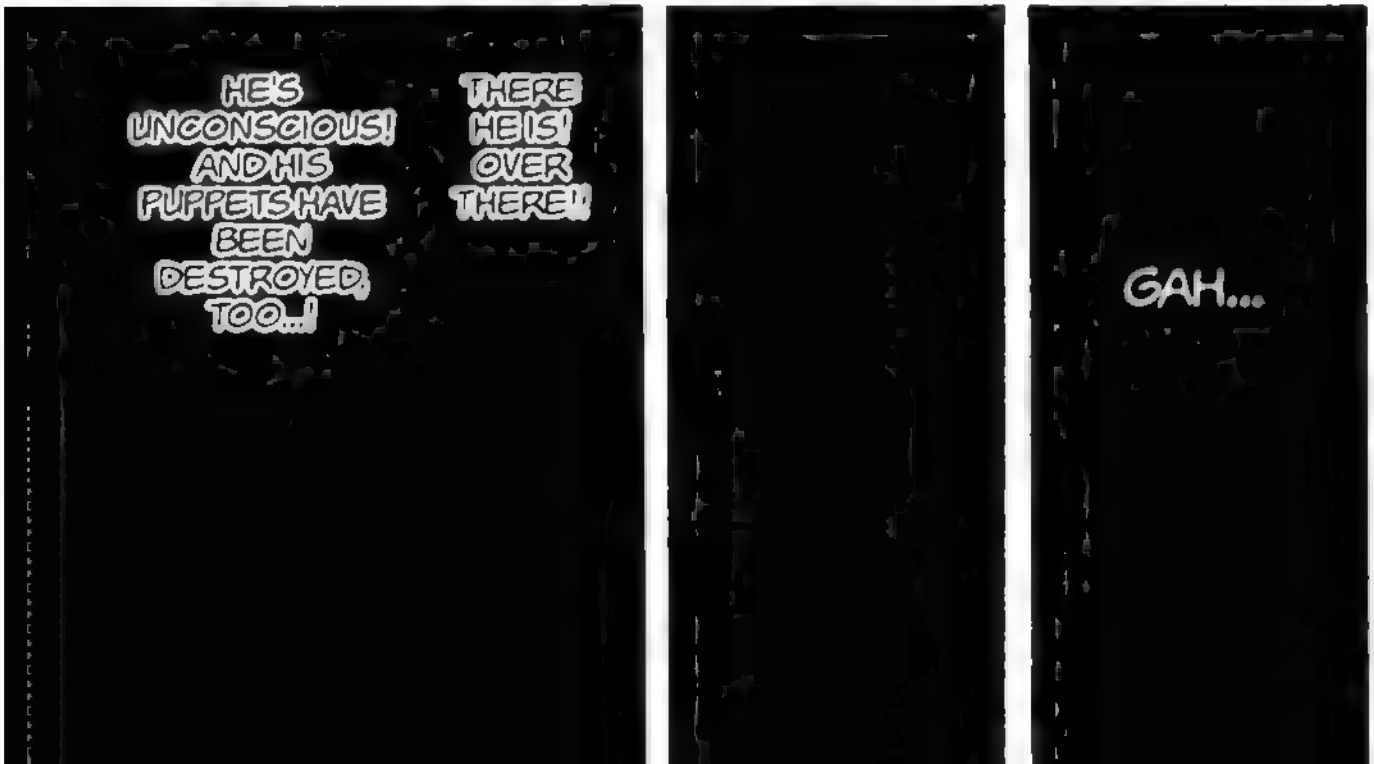

THUD

JERK
RIP
SLASH
KASHINK
RIP
TAP
UGH...
ALMOST.

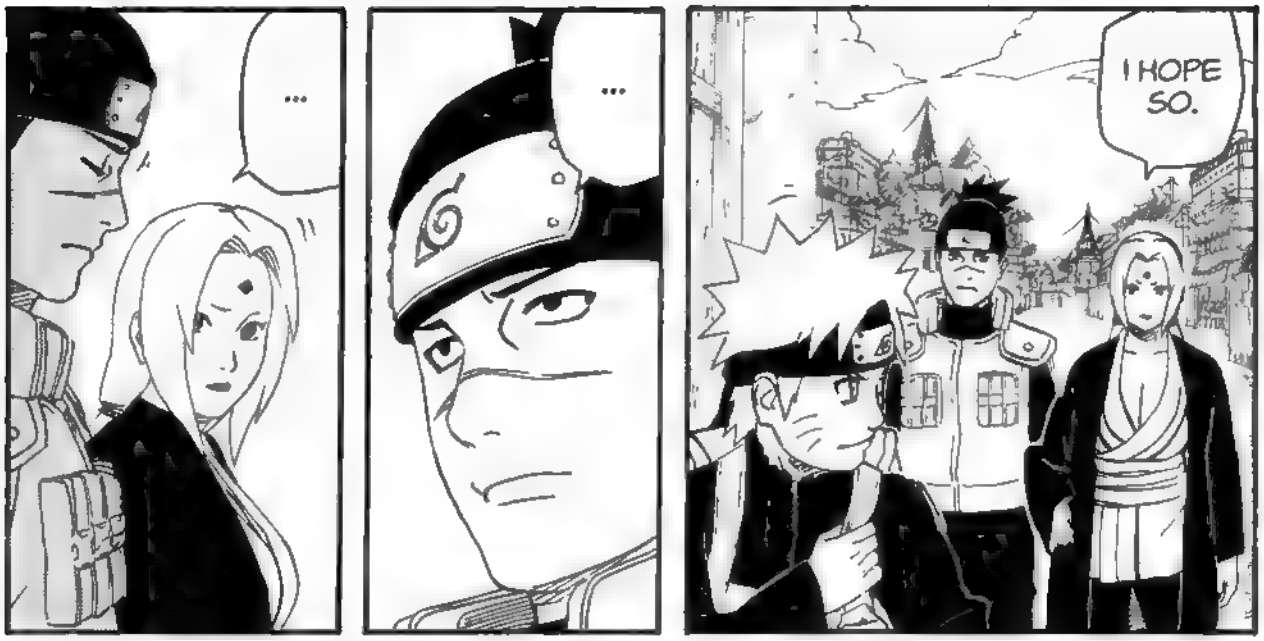
SHF
SLAM
TWITCH
WE BOTH KNOW HOW THIS IS GOING TO END...
IT'S POINTLESS TO STRUGGLE.
YOU HAVE TWO, MAYBE THREE DAYS. I DON'T HAVE TO FINISH YOU NOW.
WHOOOOOSH
SHF
THE POISON'S SPREAD-ING.

GAARA...




HE'S UNCONSCIOUS! AND HIS PUPPETS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED, TOO...!
THERE HE IS! OVER THERE!!
GAH...

WELL, THEN!
WE'RE OFF!
WHOO
TUG
I'LL RETURN, LADY TSUNADE!!
OOSH


...
...
I HOPE SO.

THANK YOU!
GOOD LUCK!

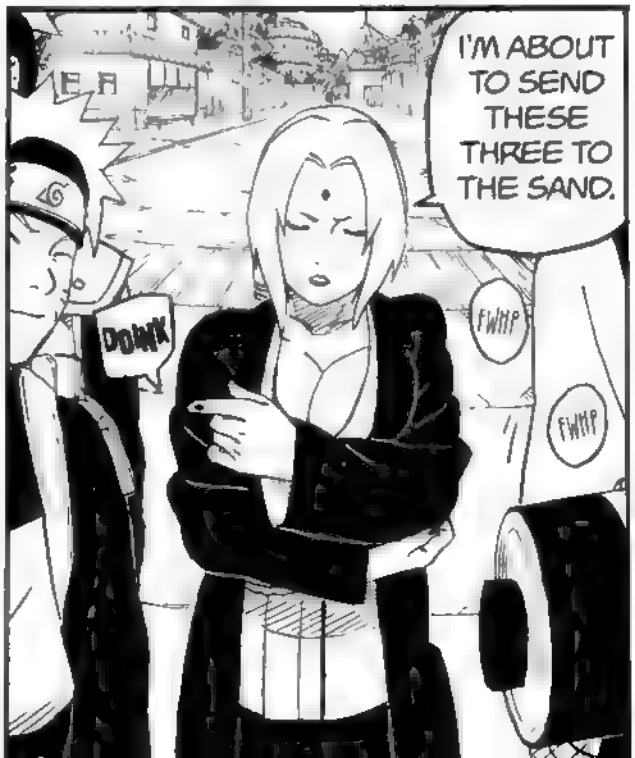
!
TUMP

NARUTO, YA HEADING OUT ON A MISSION?
油
THUMP
HEY!

THE KAZEKAGE'S BEEN...
I KNOW.
STOMP!
OH, BUT BEFORE THAT...
BAD NEWS, TSUNADE.

YUP!

KNOWING NARUTO'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AKATSUKI...
IS THAT WISE...?
FSST
WHISPER
WHISPER


I'M ABOUT TO SEND THESE THREE TO THE SAND.
DOINK
FWHP
FWHP

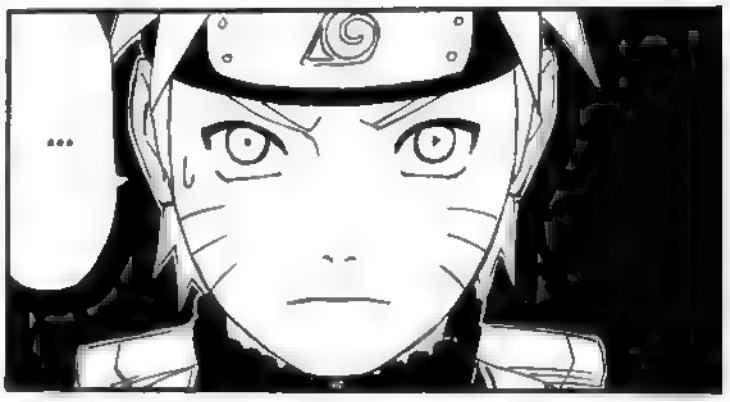
...
DON'T PUSH IT IF IT COMES TO A FIGHT AGAINST THE AKATSUKI, YOU HEAR ME...?
EH?
TMP
SHUP
NARUTO, C'MERE.
CRUNCH CRUNCH

...
...SO I'M GONNA MEET THEM ON MY TERMS!
HEY, THEY'RE THE ONES WHO'VE GOT BUSINESS WITH ME...

I THINK YOU KNOW THIS ALREADY, BUT...
NARUTO, LOOK...
...
GNASH
...BUT IF YOU LOSE YOUR COOL, YOU'LL JUST DIG YOUR OWN GRAVE.
YOU ARE STRONGER THAN BEFORE, THAT'S TRUE...
YOUR QUICK TEMPER'S STILL YOUR ACHILLES' HEEL.

油
...JUST DON'T USE THAT JUTSU...

I KNOW...

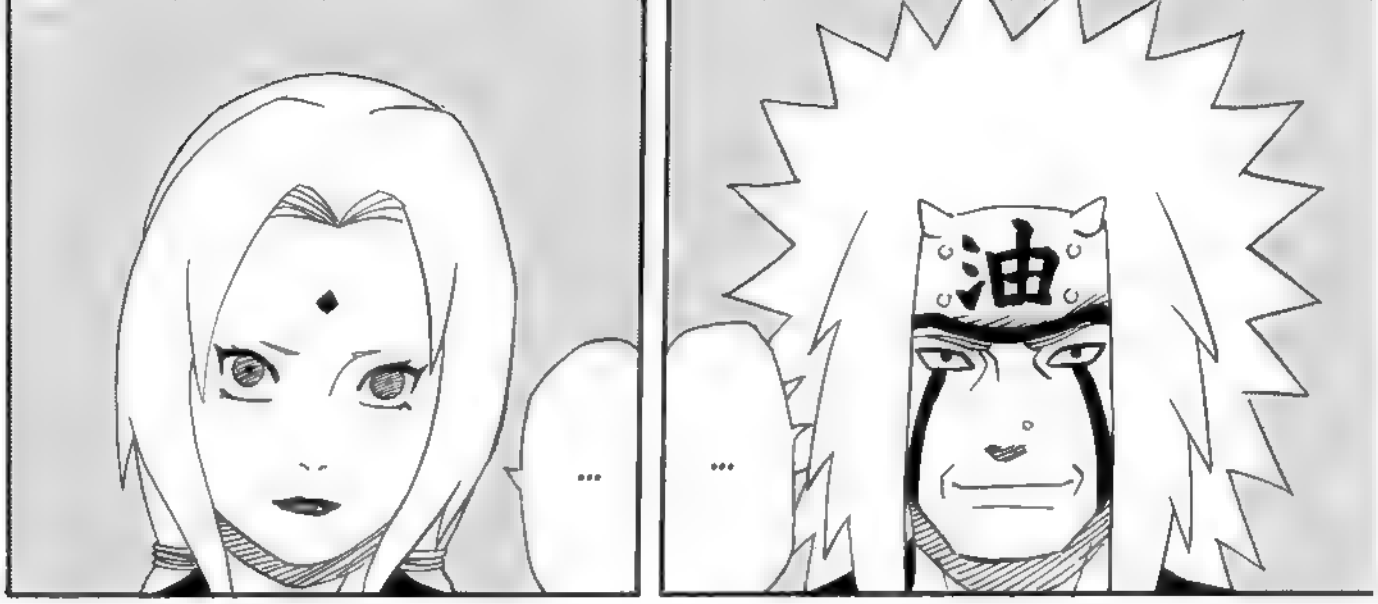

...

DON'T WORRY...

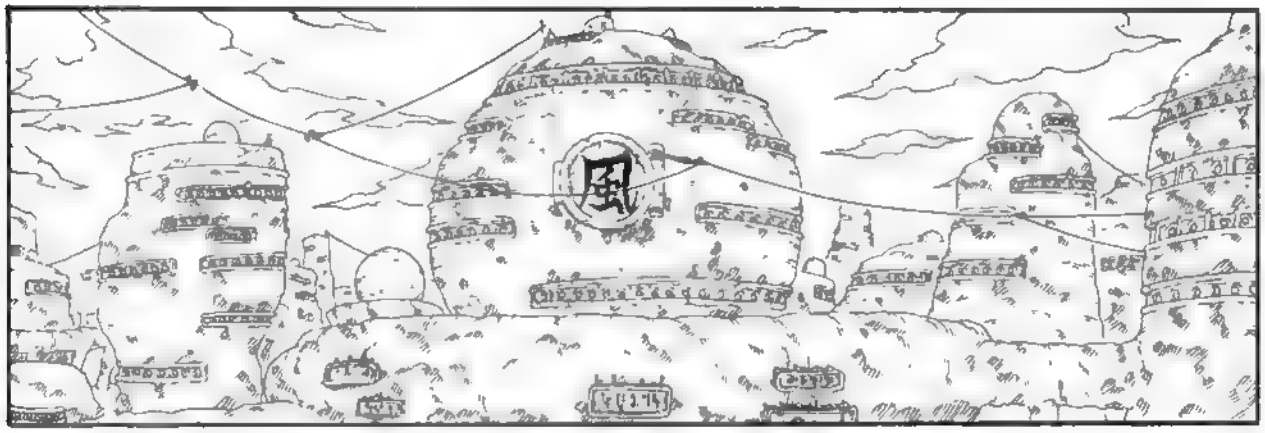
油
I'M COUNTING ON YOU...!
KAKASHI...KEEP AN EYE ON HIM. DON'T LET HIM GO TOO CRAZY.

STOMP
STOMP

WELL, THEN.
H...HEY! WAIT UP!
MASTER KAKASHI! SAKURA! LET'S GO ALREADY!!
KLIP KLIP
...HOO BOY...
SHOOF
WORRIED...?
...
...NEITHER HE NOR SAKURA...
THEY'RE NO LONGER WEAK LITTLE SHINOBI...
NAH... NOT ANY-MORE...

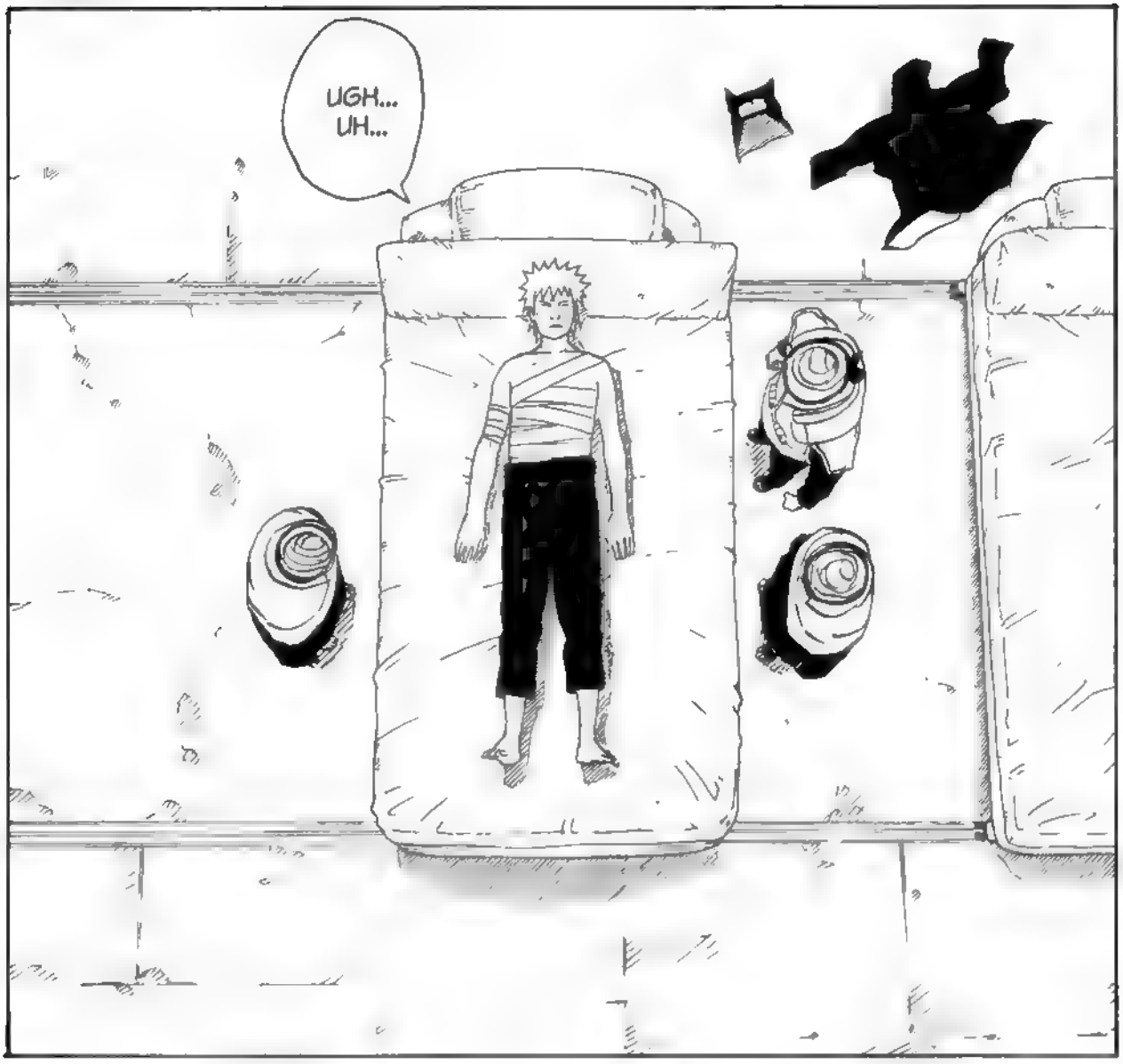

...
...

GROWING UP...
...SURE IS A MYSTERIOUS THING.

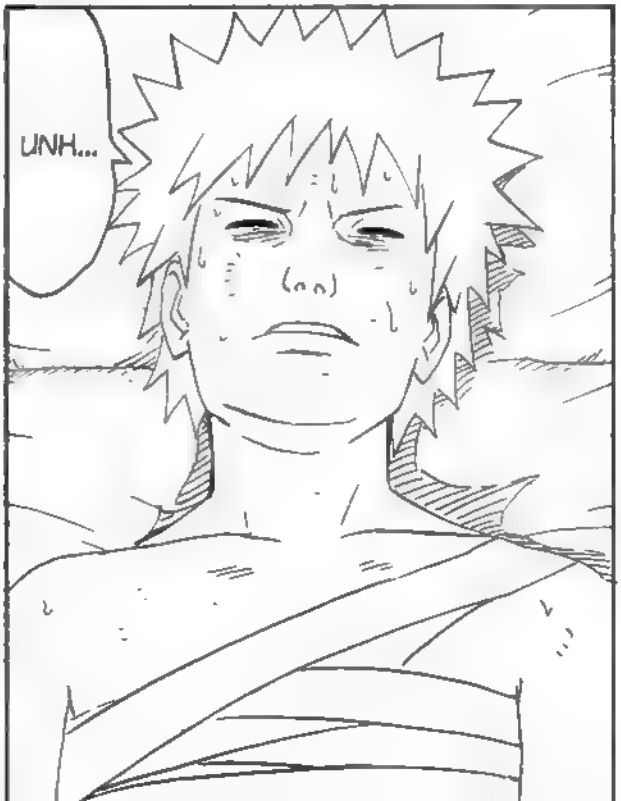


FIRST GAARA...
...AND NOW KANKURO...?

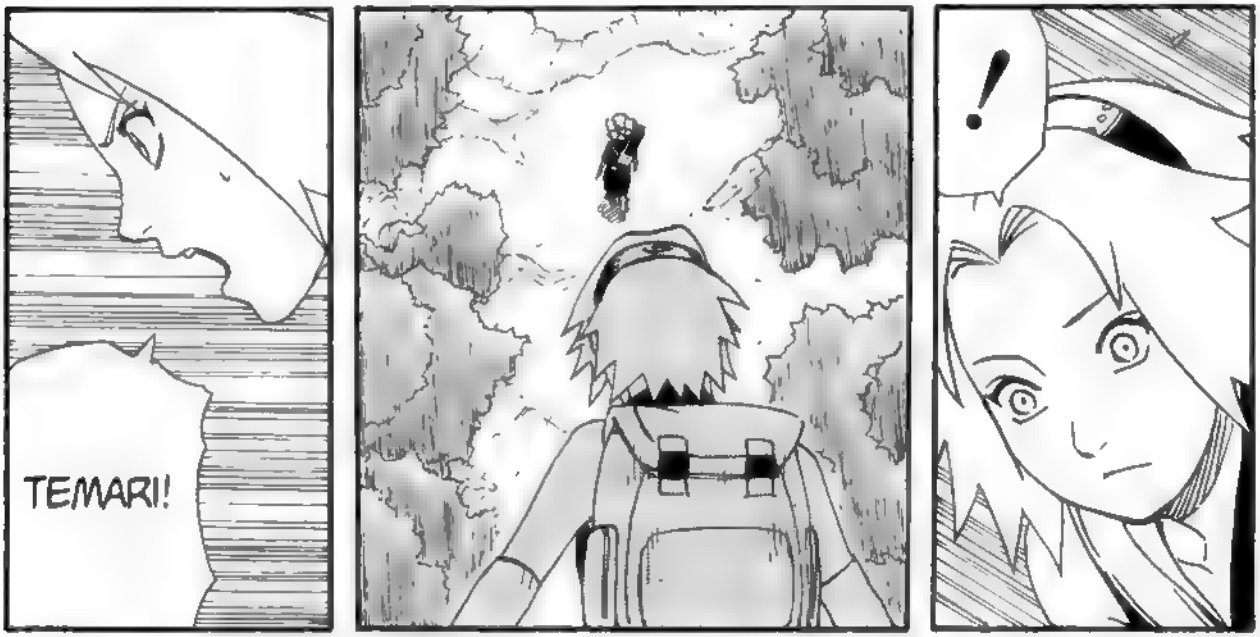
BUT WE'VE GOT TO HURRY...
...HE'S GOT TWO, MAYBE THREE DAYS... TOPS.
HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DEVELOP AN ANTIDOTE...
...FOR A POISON WE'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN BEFORE?


UGH... UH...

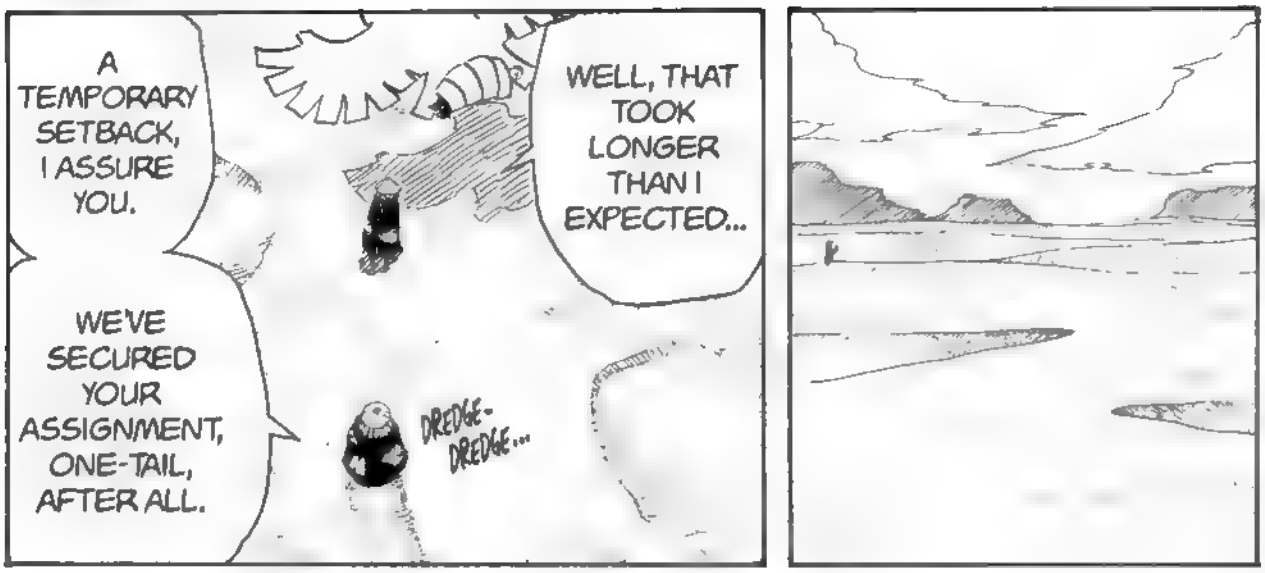
...OUR ONLY CHOICE IS TO CONSULT THE OLD ONES...
...IN THAT CASE...


UNH...

WHOOSH
SHOO


TEMARI!
!

?!


A TEMPORARY SETBACK, I ASSURE YOU.
WELL, THAT TOOK LONGER THAN I EXPECTED...
WE'VE SECURED YOUR ASSIGNMENT, ONE-TAIL, AFTER ALL.
DREDGE-DREDGE...

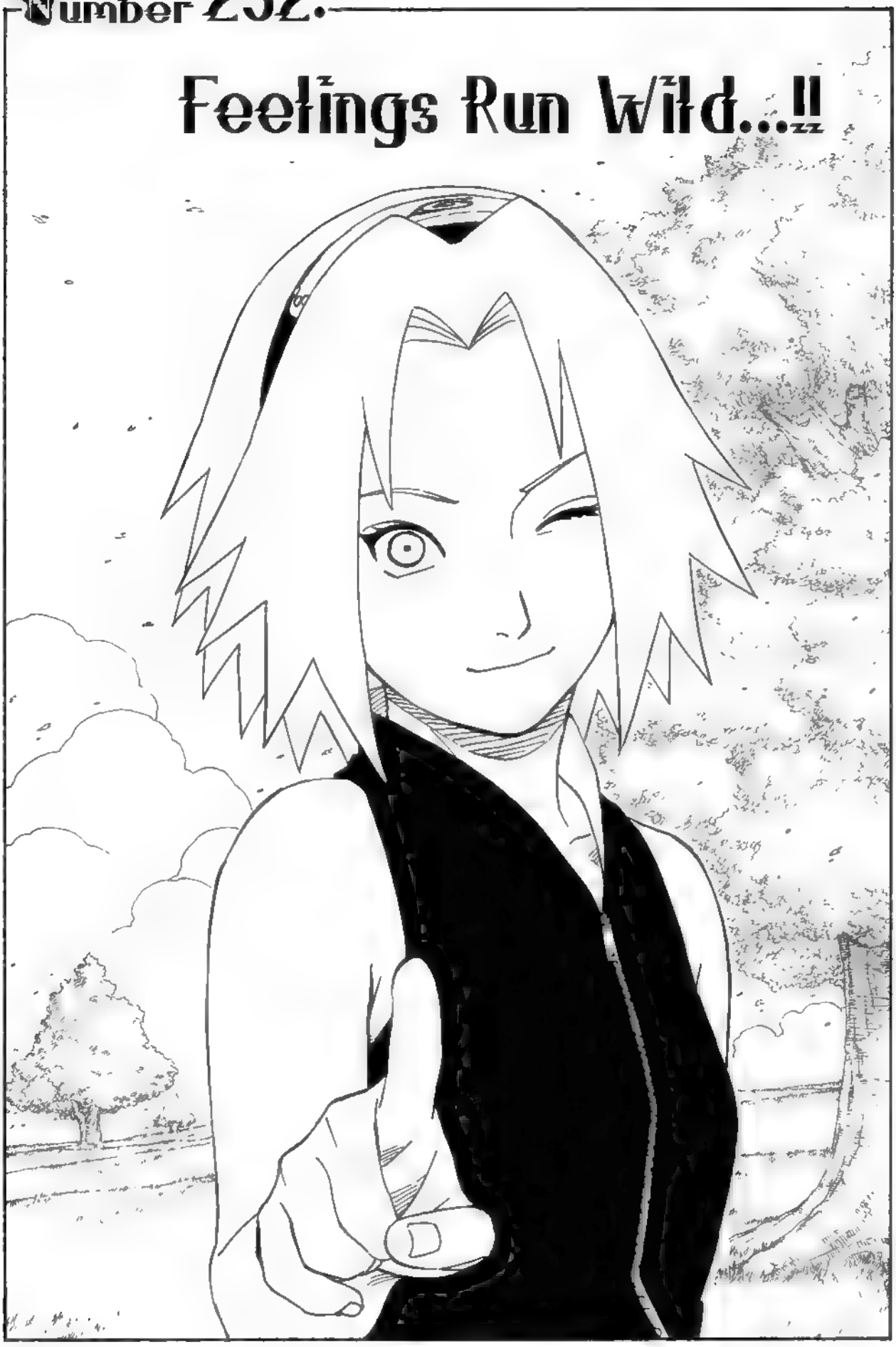
WOULD CERTAINLY SAVE US THE TROUBLE...
I WISH IT WOULD JUST COME TO US.
NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT IS *MY* ASSIGNMENT...
BY THE WAY, WHAT KIND OF JINCHÛRIKI HOST IS YOURS, SASORI?
...BUT SINCE WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE IT IS YET...
FWIH

AS LONG AS WE CATCH ONE, THEY CAN'T COMPLAIN... *WHICHEVER* ONE IT IS...
WHO KNOWS... AND WHO CARES?

NARUTO

Number 252:

Feelings Run Wild...!!



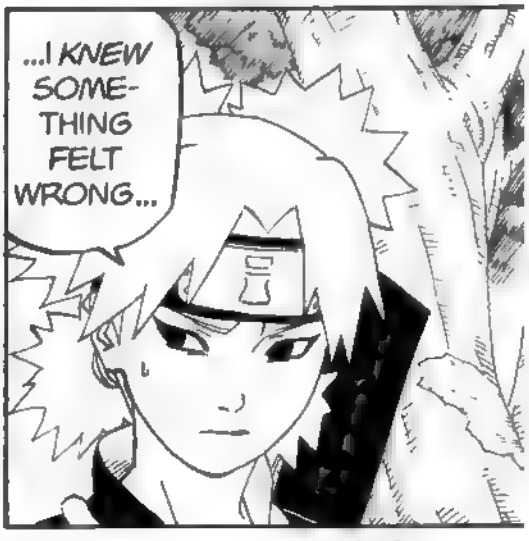
GAARA ?!
WHAT ?!

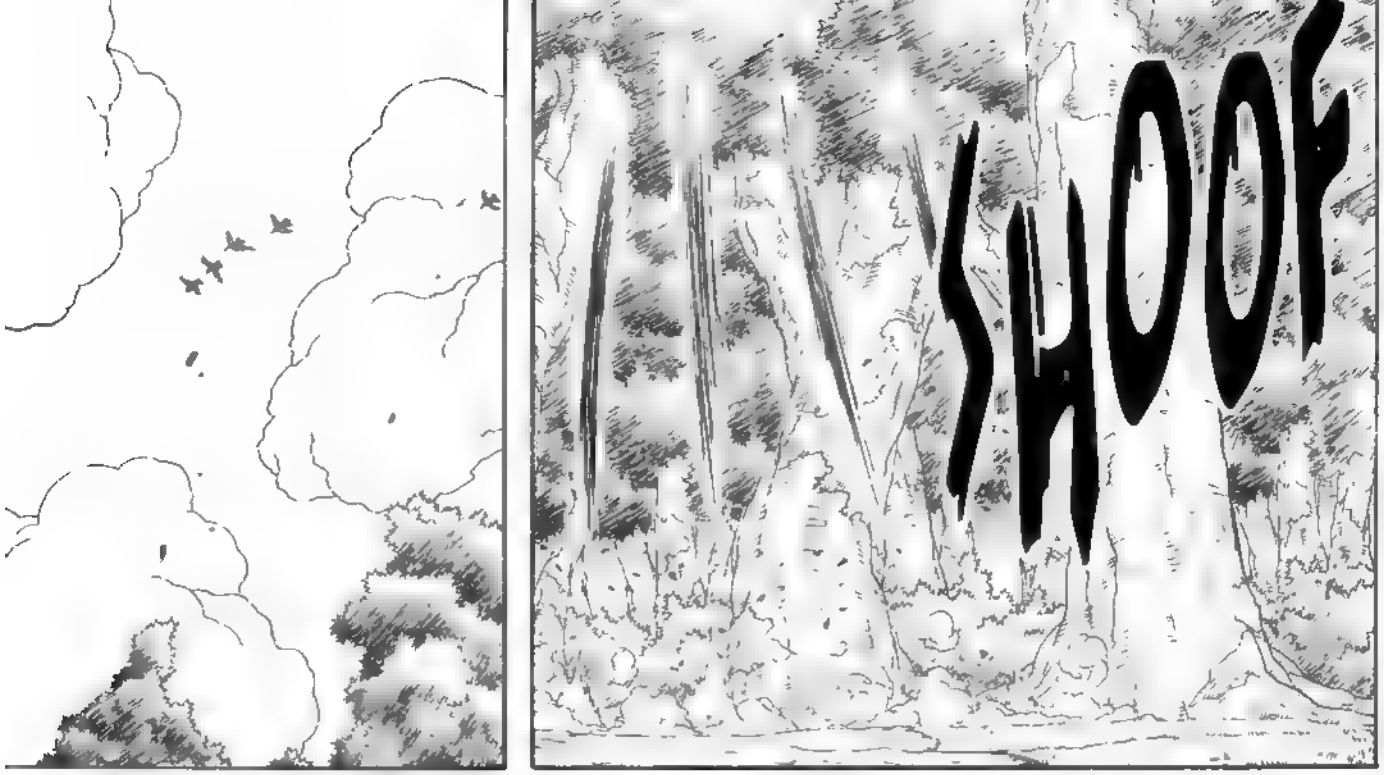
CRACK!

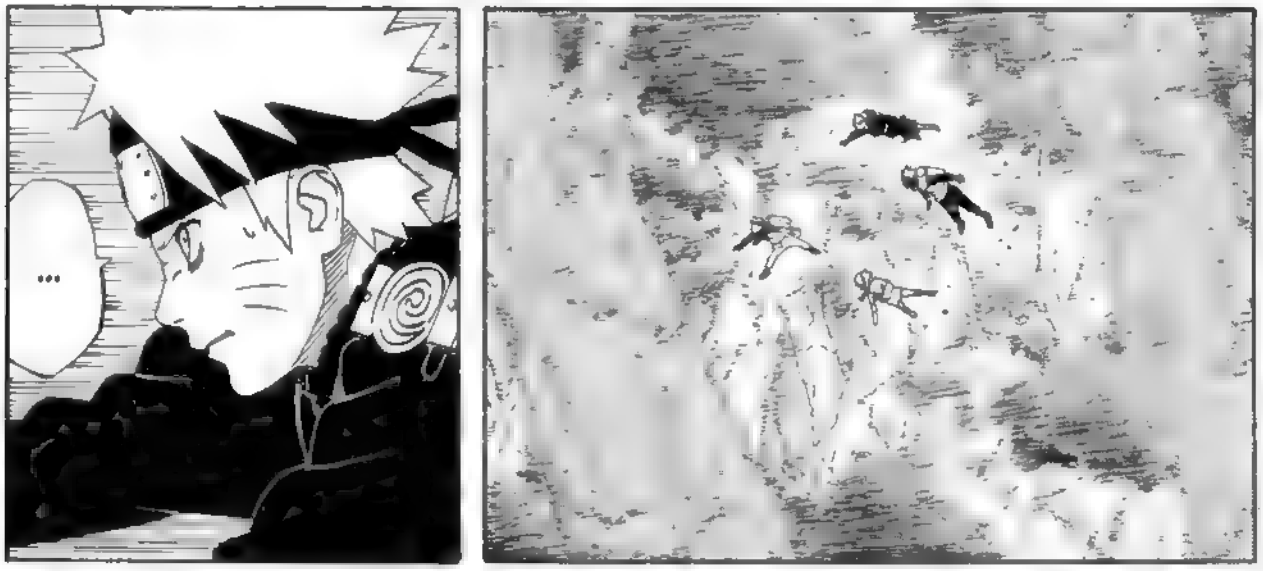
...

RIGHT! LET'S GO!
GRIND...

...IT'S GOING TO TAKE THREE DAYS TO GET TO THE SAND...
...WE'D BETTER HURRY.


...I KNEW SOME-THING FELT WRONG...

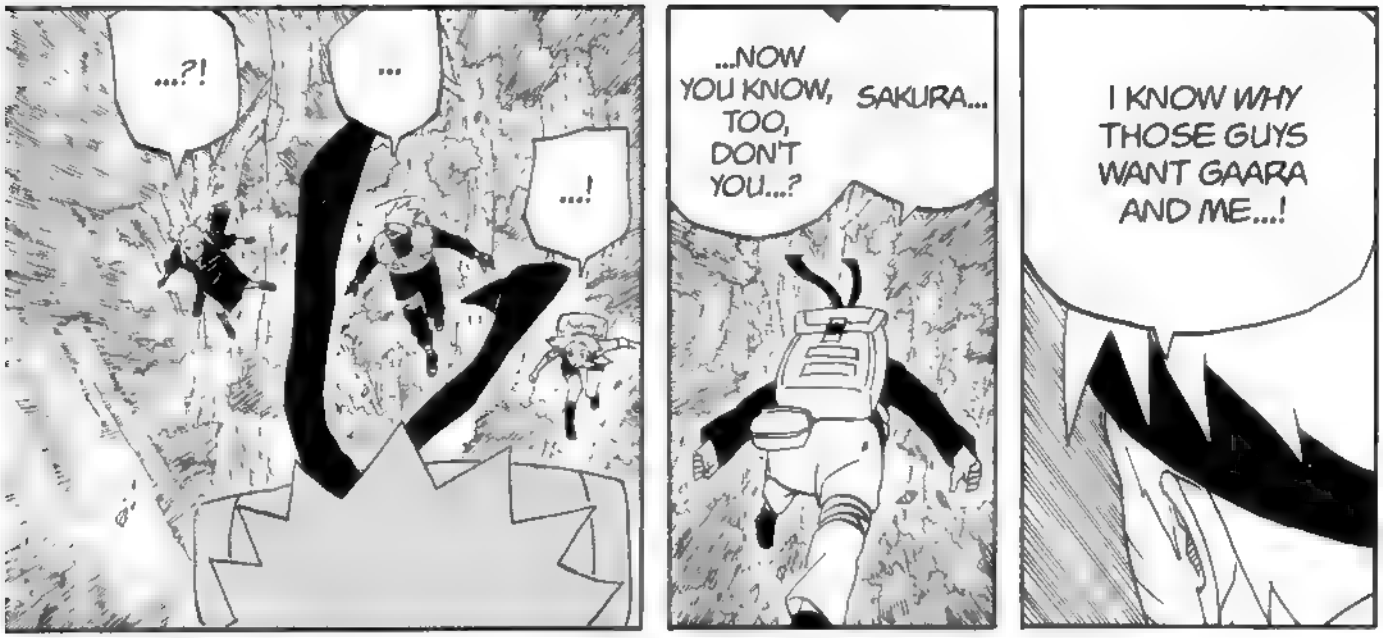

SHOOF


...

THEY MIGHT BE THINKING OF PLACING ITS POWER UNDER THEIR CONTROL. WHILE THE NINE-TAILED FOX SPIRIT IS STILL SEALED INSIDE YOU...
IT'S NOT YOU THEY WANT. IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE YOU.

...TO TAKE NARUTO WITH US IS THE SUPREME ORDER GIVEN UNTO US BY THE AKATSUKI.

SLAM
SQUINCH
...WE CAN'T BREAK FORMATION.
NARUTO... NO MATTER HOW MUCH OF A RUSH WE'RE IN...
...DIDN'T LORD JIRAIYA JUST LECTURE YOU ABOUT YOUR TEMPER?
CALM DOWN...
VOOSH
!
...!
!
...
I HATE THIS!
...

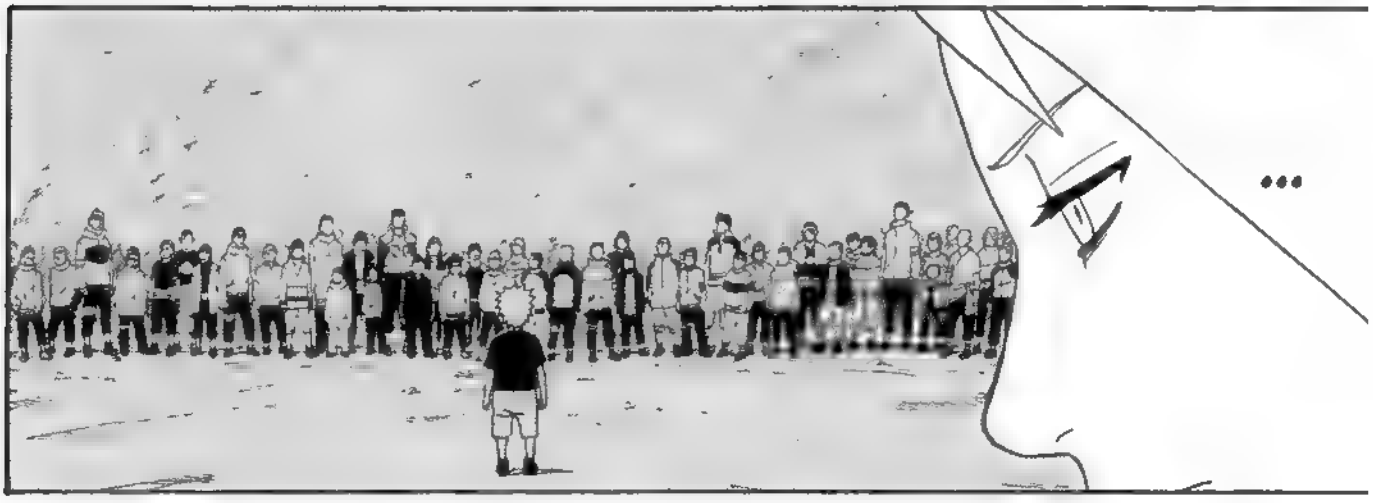

...?!
...
...!
...NOW YOU KNOW, TOO, DON'T YOU...?
SAKURA...
I KNOW WHY THOSE GUYS WANT GAARA AND ME...!

I DON'T LIKE IT...!
...THE NINE-TAILED FOX SPIRIT SEALED INSIDE ME...

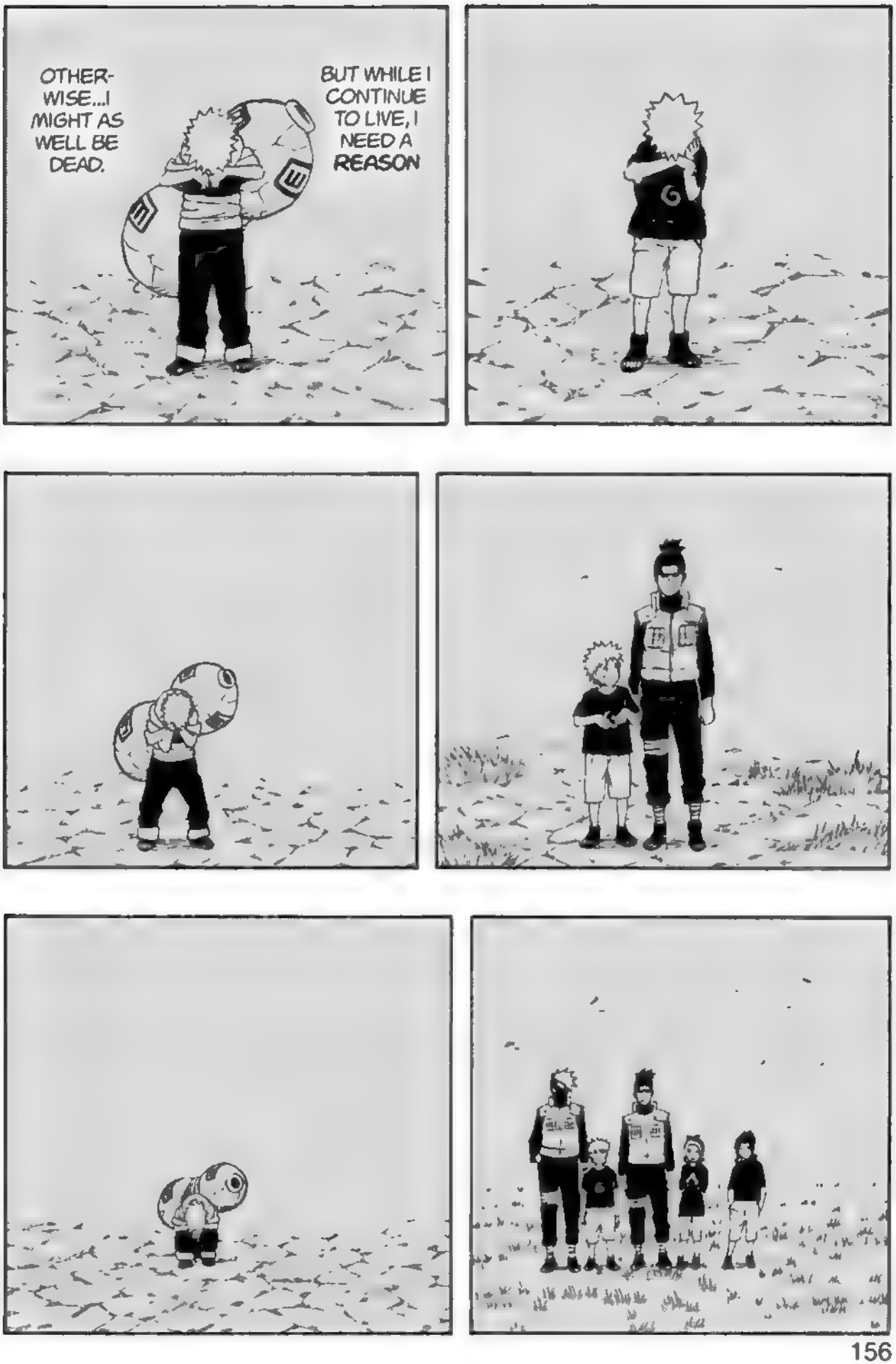
...
...
...?!

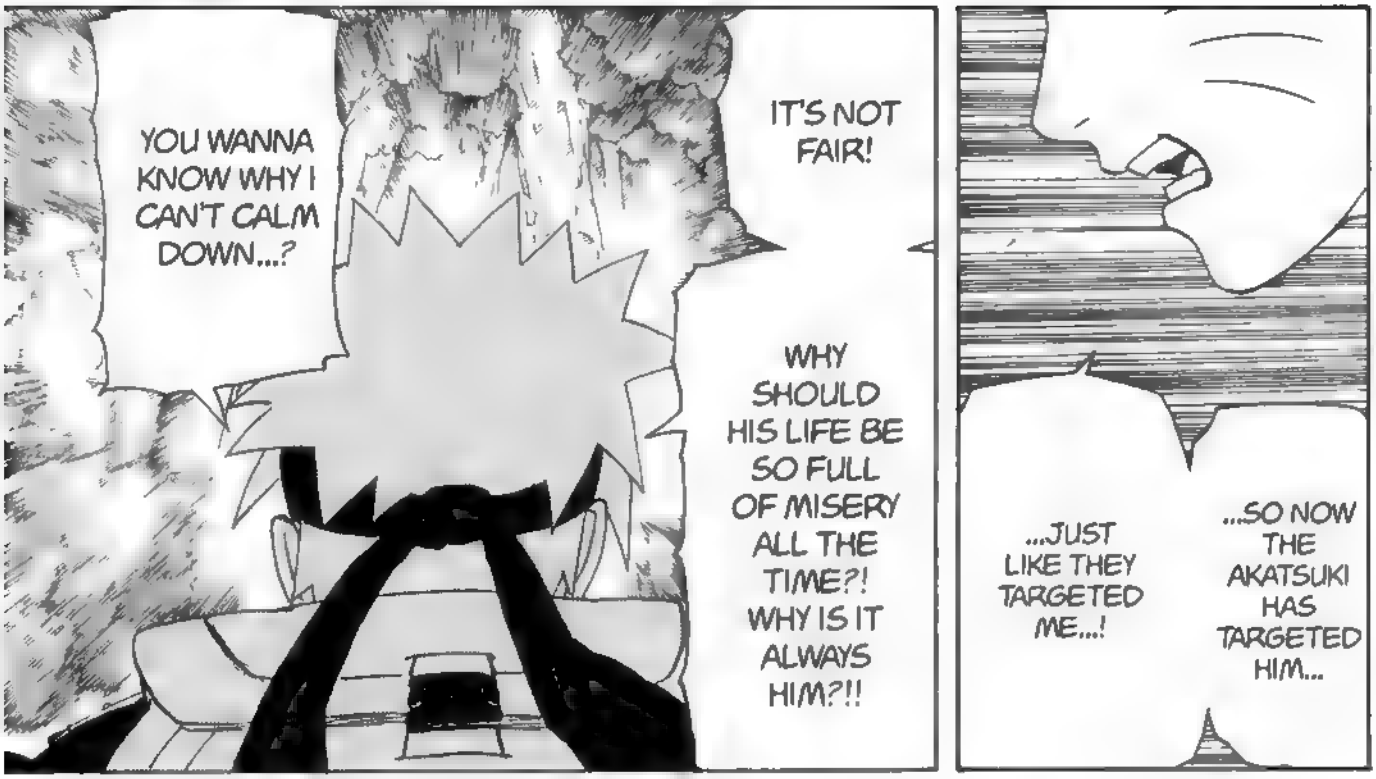
BOTH GAARA AND ME...
...WE'RE CARRYING MONSTERS INSIDE OUR BODIES...
...AND THAT'S WHAT THEY WANT! OUR MONSTERS!

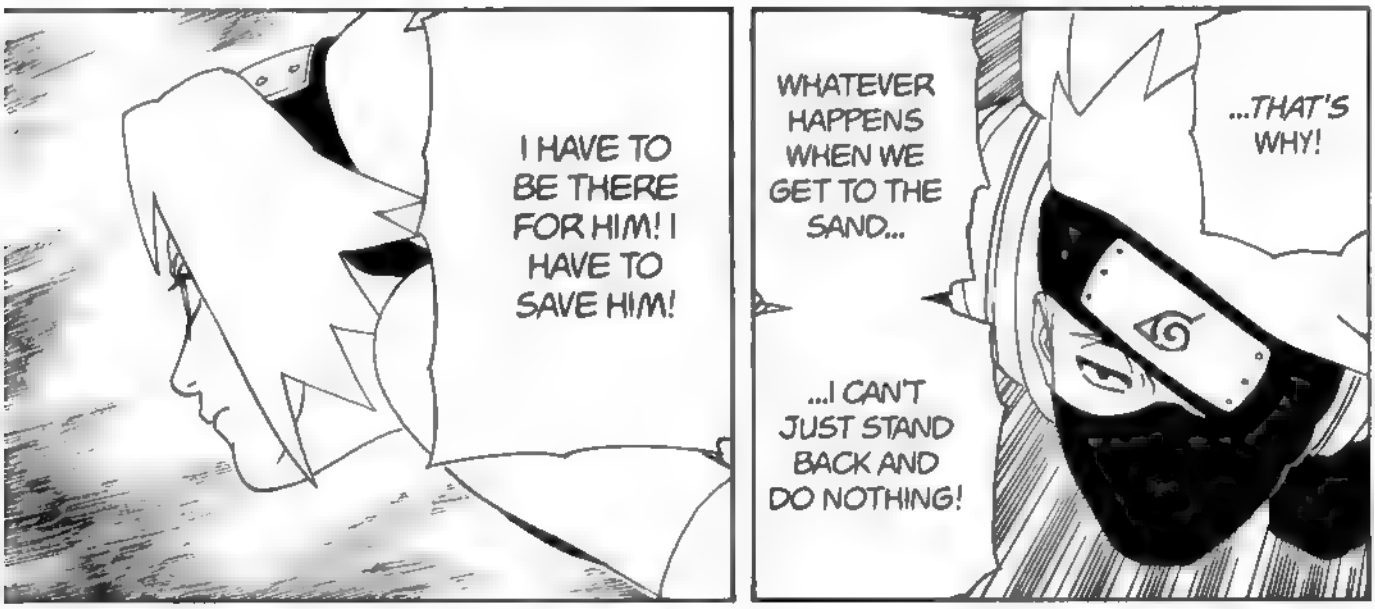
IT'S AWFUL...!
THEY ONLY SEE US AS MONSTERS!
I DON'T LIKE THE WAY THEY LOOK AT US!
...!


...

...HAD THE SAME KIND OF LONELY LIFE...
GAARA AND I...
I WAS BORN A MONSTER!
A MONSTER, EH...? ACTUALLY... I'VE GOT ONE OF THOSE TOO.
...
BUT IT WAS EVEN WORSE FOR HIM...
...'CUZ HE SUFFERED AND FOUGHT ALONE A LOT LONGER...!
SO...FOR WHAT PURPOSE DO I EXIST? WHY AM I ALIVE? AT FIRST, WHEN I ASKED MYSELF THAT, I HAD NO ANSWER.
TO THEM, I AM NOW A RELIC OF THE PAST THAT THEY WISH TO ERASE AND FORGET.
...

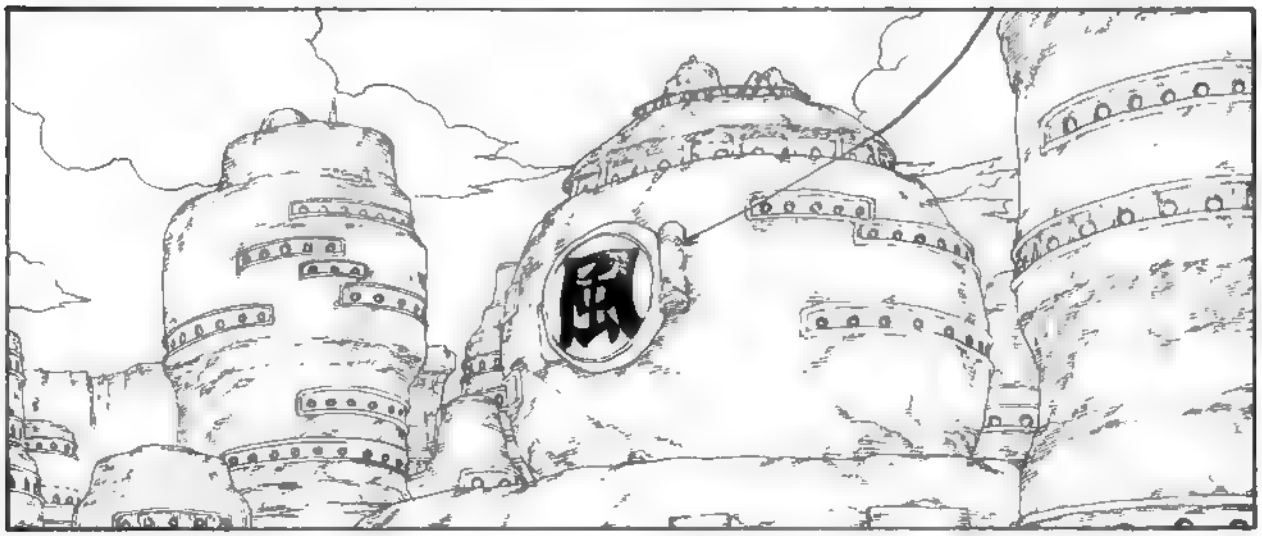

OTHER-WISE...I MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD.
BUT WHILE I CONTINUE TO LIVE, I NEED A REASON

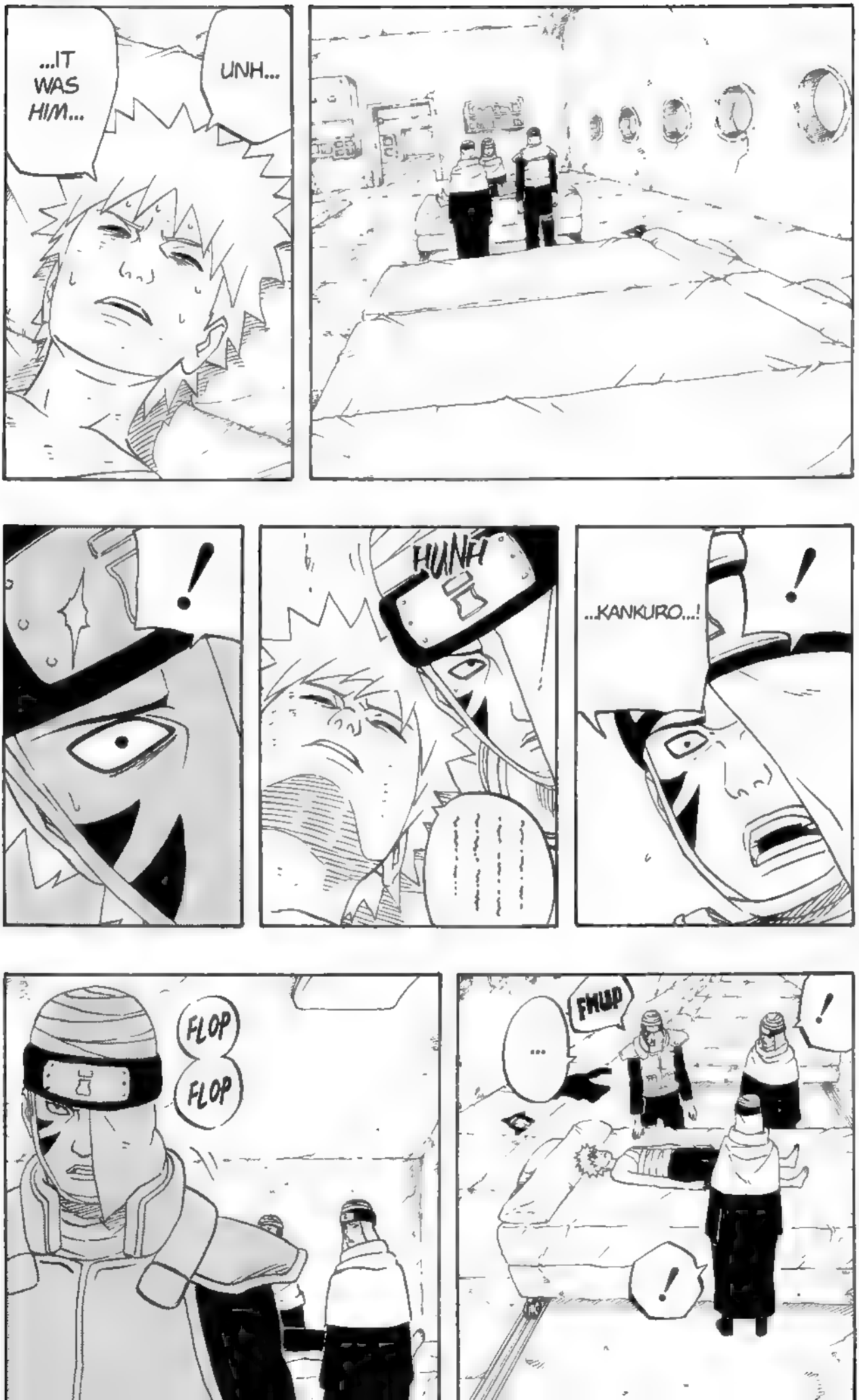

YOU WANNA KNOW WHY I CAN'T CALM DOWN...?
IT'S NOT FAIR!
WHY SHOULD HIS LIFE BE SO FULL OF MISERY ALL THE TIME?! WHY IS IT ALWAYS HIM?!!
...JUST LIKE THEY TARGETED ME...!
...SO NOW THE AKATSUKI HAS TARGETED HIM...


I HAVE TO BE THERE FOR HIM! I HAVE TO SAVE HIM!
WHATEVER HAPPENS WHEN WE GET TO THE SAND...
...I CAN'T JUST STAND BACK AND DO NOTHING!
...THAT'S WHY!

UZUMAKI NARUTO...
...
...

...THANK YOU...


風


...IT WAS HIM...
UNH...
!
HUNH
..KANKURO...!
!
FLOP
FLOP
...
FWUP
!
!

HEY, SIS...!
SIS...
SPLISH
YOU DEAD...?

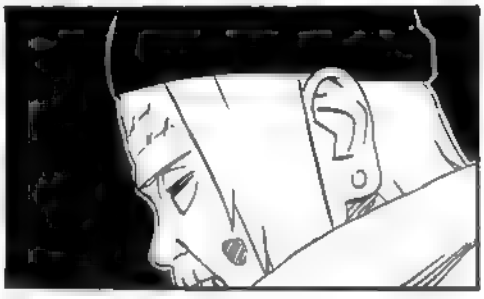
JUST KIDDING, PLAYING POSSUM!
TEE HEE HEE!

CRUNCH

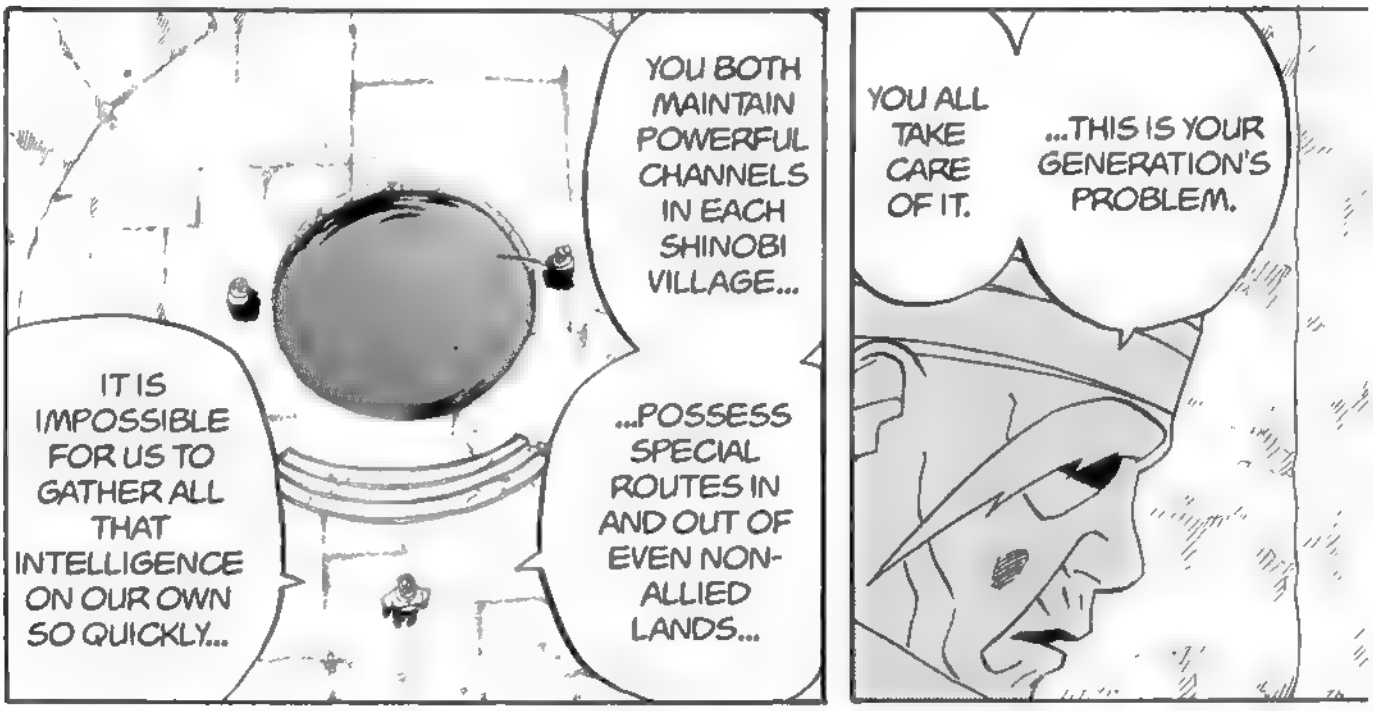
...
CUT IT OUT, SIS...THAT WAS WAY TOO REAL.

SPLISH...

HONORED OLD ONES...
...I COME PLEADING FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

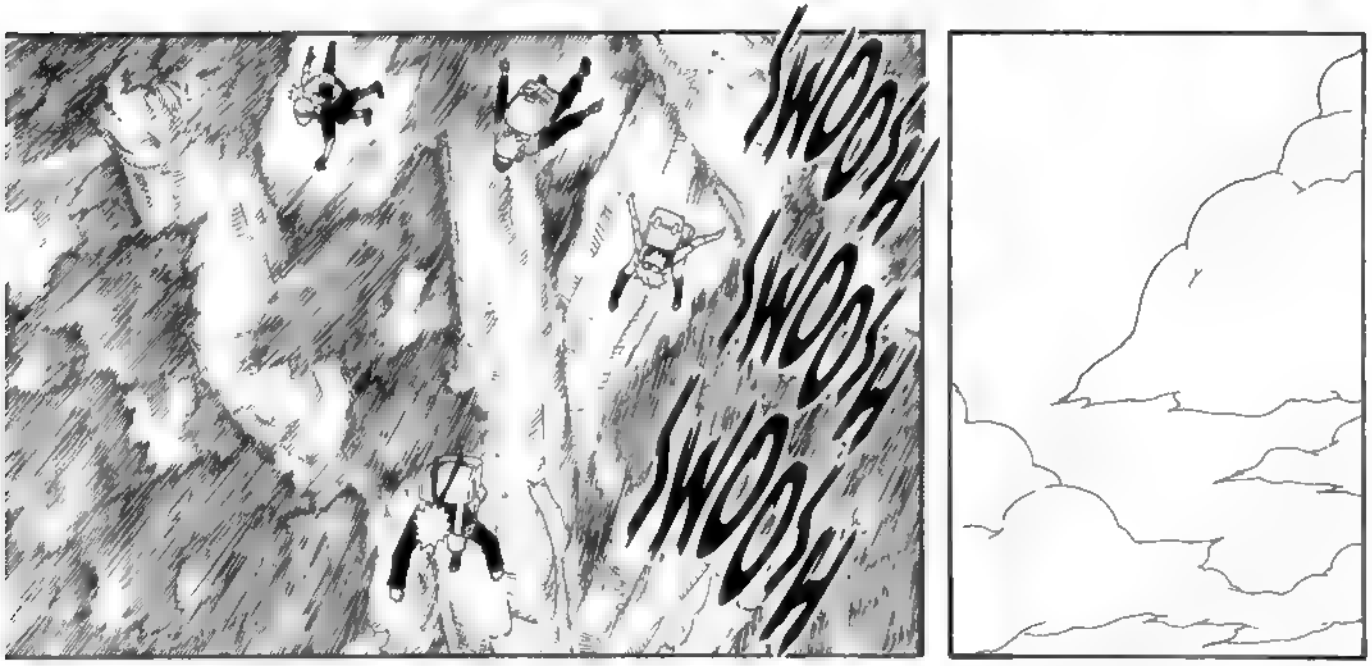


AN ORGANIZATION CALLED THE AKATSUKI HAS TAKEN SHUKAKU HOSTAGE...
IF WE LET THEM GET AWAY WITH THIS, TERRIBLE THINGS ARE BOUND TO HAPPEN.
...LIKE ANCIENT TEXTS, WE TWO OUGHT TO BE BUNDLED TOGETHER AND LEFT TO COLLECT DUST ON SOME HIGH SHELF...
WHAT CAN THE LIKES OF US POSSIBLY DO, HERE AND NOW...?


IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO GATHER ALL THAT INTELLIGENCE ON OUR OWN SO QUICKLY...
YOU BOTH MAINTAIN POWERFUL CHANNELS IN EACH SHINOBI VILLAGE...
...POSSESS SPECIAL ROUTES IN AND OUT OF EVEN NON-ALLIED LANDS...
YOU ALL TAKE CARE OF IT.
...THIS IS YOUR GENERATION'S PROBLEM.

WELL THEN, THAT'S PERFECT.
YOU KNOW, WE BOTH RETIRED A LONG TIME AGO.
BUT I'VE NO EARTHLY AMBITIONS LEFT.
IF ANYTHING, PERHAPS I'D LIKE TO SEE MY SWEET GRANDCHILD'S FACE ONE MORE TIME, BUT THAT'S ABOUT IT...

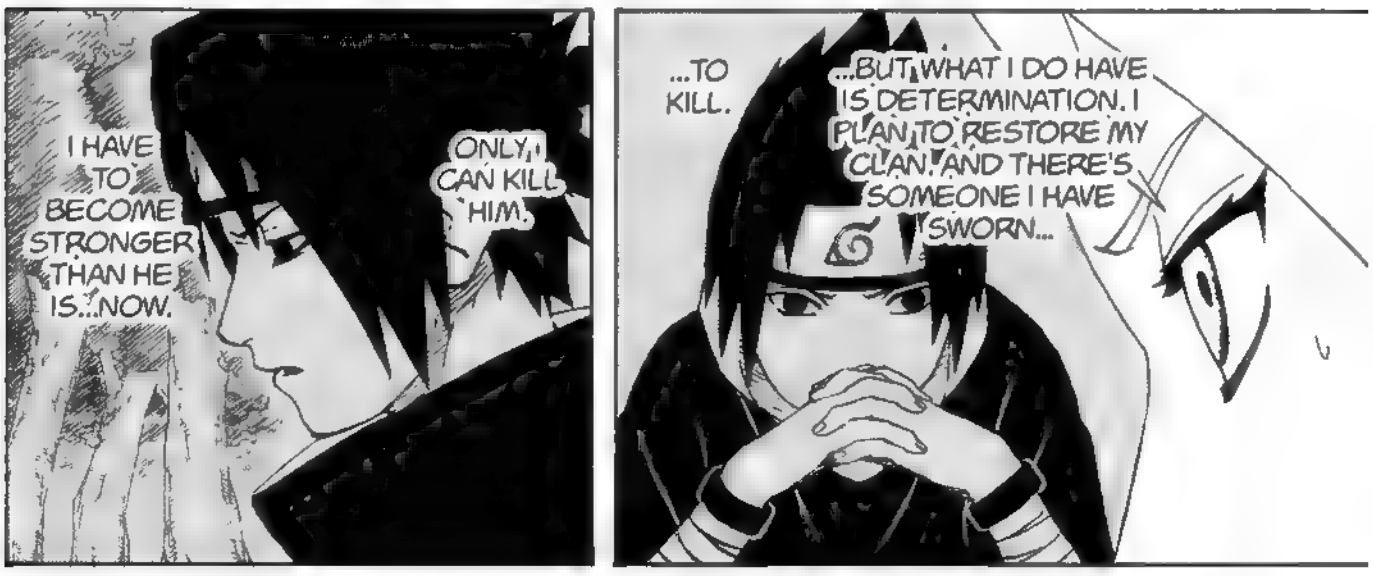
FOR YOUR GRANDSON JUST HAPPENS TO BE ONE OF THE AKATSUKI.


SWOOSH
SWOOSH
SWOOSH

?
...
YOU MET HIM ONCE, DIDN'T YOU...
!
NARUTO...

UCHIHA ITACHI...
...AND HE'S AFTER YOU.

YOU KNOW, I HAVEN'T BEEN JUST TRAINING THESE PAST TWO AND A HALF YEARS.
I SECRETLY READ LADY TSUNADE'S REPORTS...
...AND SNUCK OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE TO SNOOP AROUND AS MUCH AS I COULD.
!
...


I HAVE TO BECOME STRONGER THAN HE IS...NOW.
ONLY, I CAN KILL HIM.
...TO KILL.
...BUT WHAT I DO HAVE IS DETERMINATION. I PLAN TO RESTORE MY CLAN. AND THERE'S SOMEONE I HAVE SWORN...

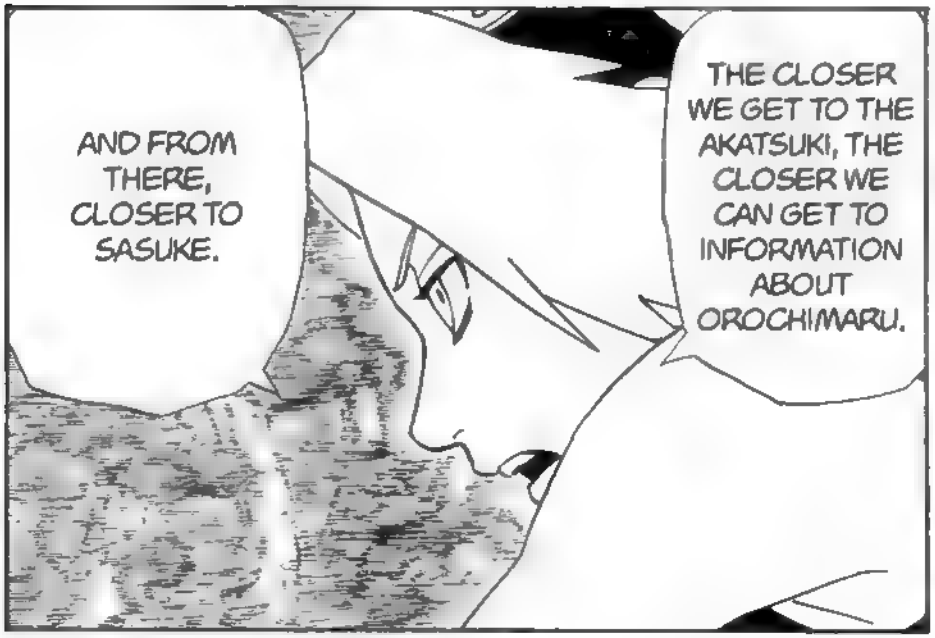
...!
THE ONE THAT'S A MEMBER OF THE AKATSUKI...?
THE PERSON SASUKE KEEPS SAYING HE WANTS TO KILL...
...IS HIS OLDER BROTHER UCHIHA ITACHI, RIGHT...?
YOU CAN SEE... THINGS WITH THOSE EYES THAT ITACHI HIMSELF NEVER DREAMED OF!
YOU REALLY ARE HIS BROTHER, AREN'T YOU?
...THE ONLY— ONE WHO'LL DO ANY ELIMINATING IS ME...!!
...STAY OUT OF THIS...
THAT'S WHY SASUKE...
...IS WITH OROCHIMARU RIGHT NOW, TRYING TO GAIN MORE POWER...
...IN THE QUEST FOR POWER!
I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AGAIN, SASUKE...

AND WE ONLY HAVE ABOUT HALF A YEAR LEFT UNTIL HE CAN TRANSFER AGAIN...
BUT OROCHIMARU WANTS SASUKE'S BODY, RIGHT?

...IS THIS.
WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY...

...WAS ONCE A MEMBER OF THE AKATSUKI AS WELL...
AND OROCHI-MARU HIMSELF...

!!
SO SAKURA KNOWS ABOUT THAT, TOO...!

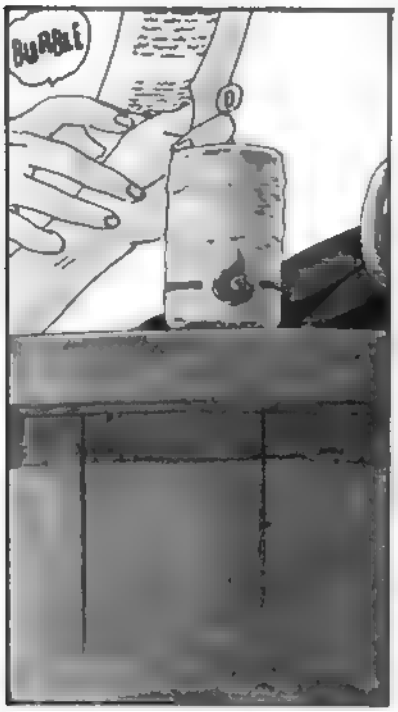

AND FROM THERE, CLOSER TO SASUKE.
THE CLOSER WE GET TO THE AKATSUKI, THE CLOSER WE CAN GET TO INFORMATION ABOUT OROCHIMARU.

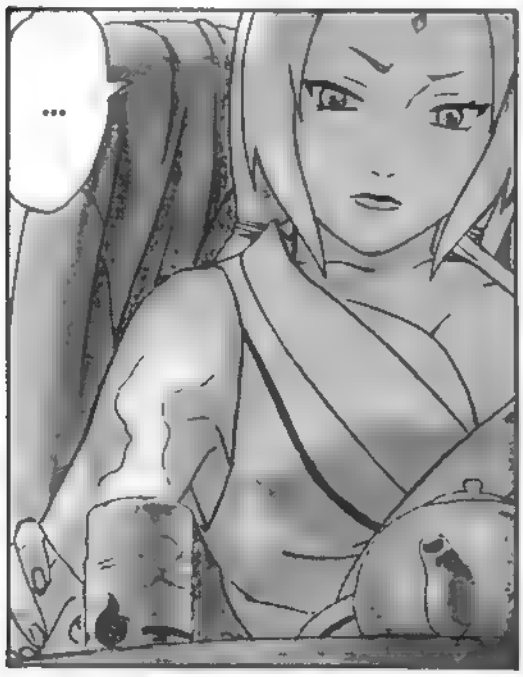
?!

YUP!
TIME IS RUNNING OUT. WE'VE ONLY GOT HALF A YEAR LEFT TO FIND SASUKE...
CLENCH
...NARUTO'S WORST ENEMY... AND THE ONE WHO'S TORMENTED SASUKE ALL THESE YEARS.
AFTER THAT, WE CAN GO AFTER UCHIHA ITACHI...
AND THIS TIME...
...I'LL PROTECT THEM BOTH...!!

NARUTO

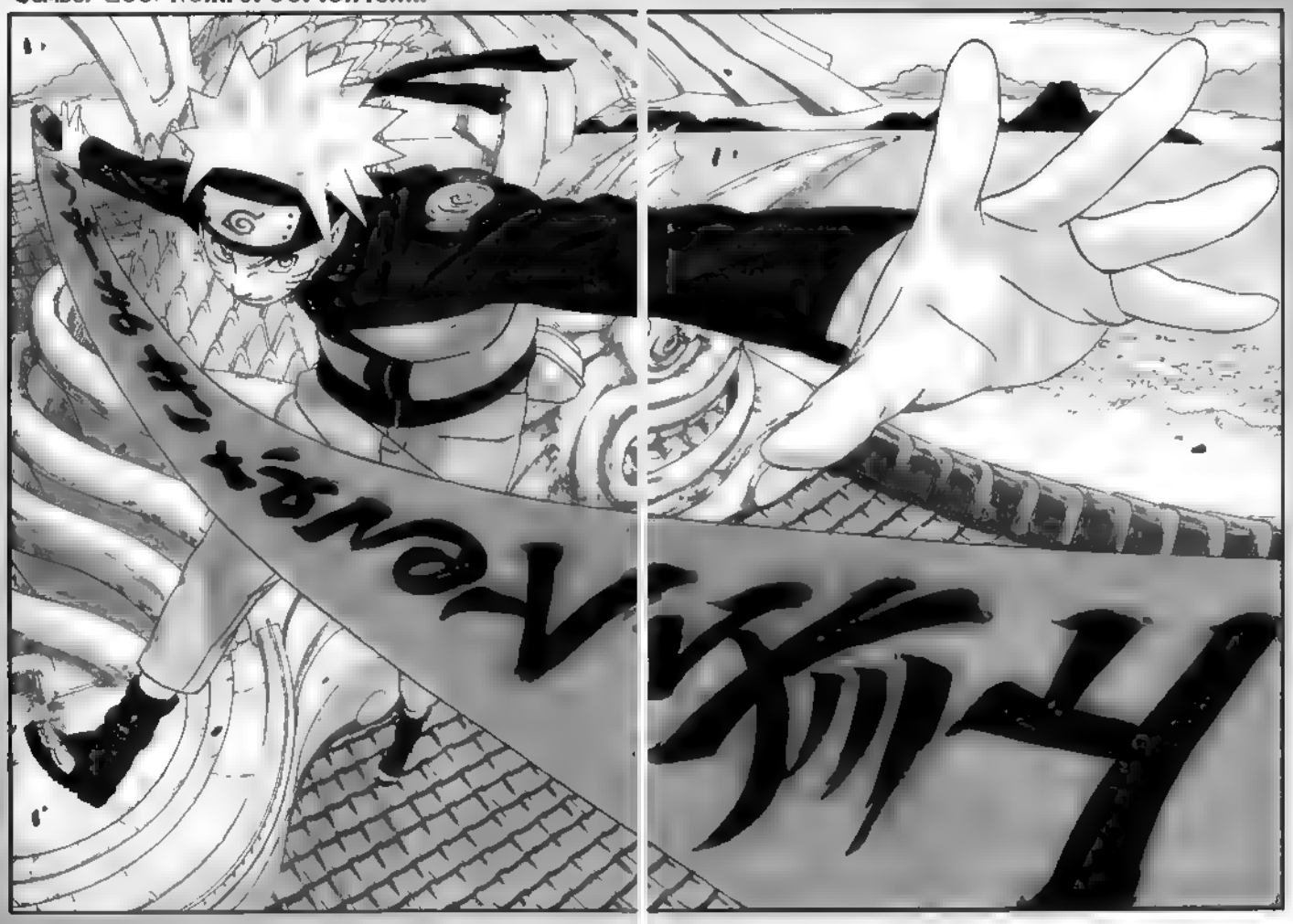
Number 253:
Reinforcements...!!


BUBBLE


...

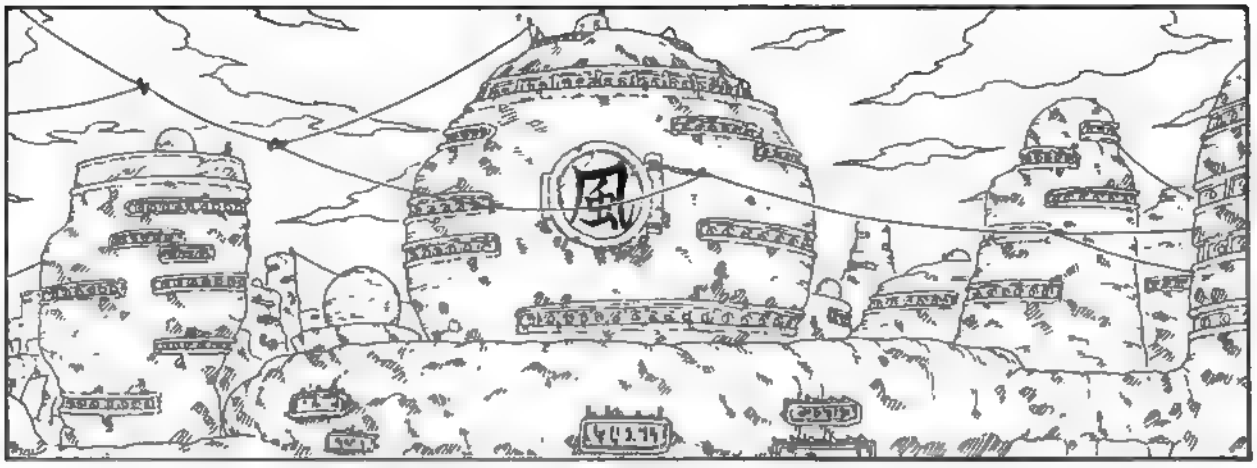
CRACK

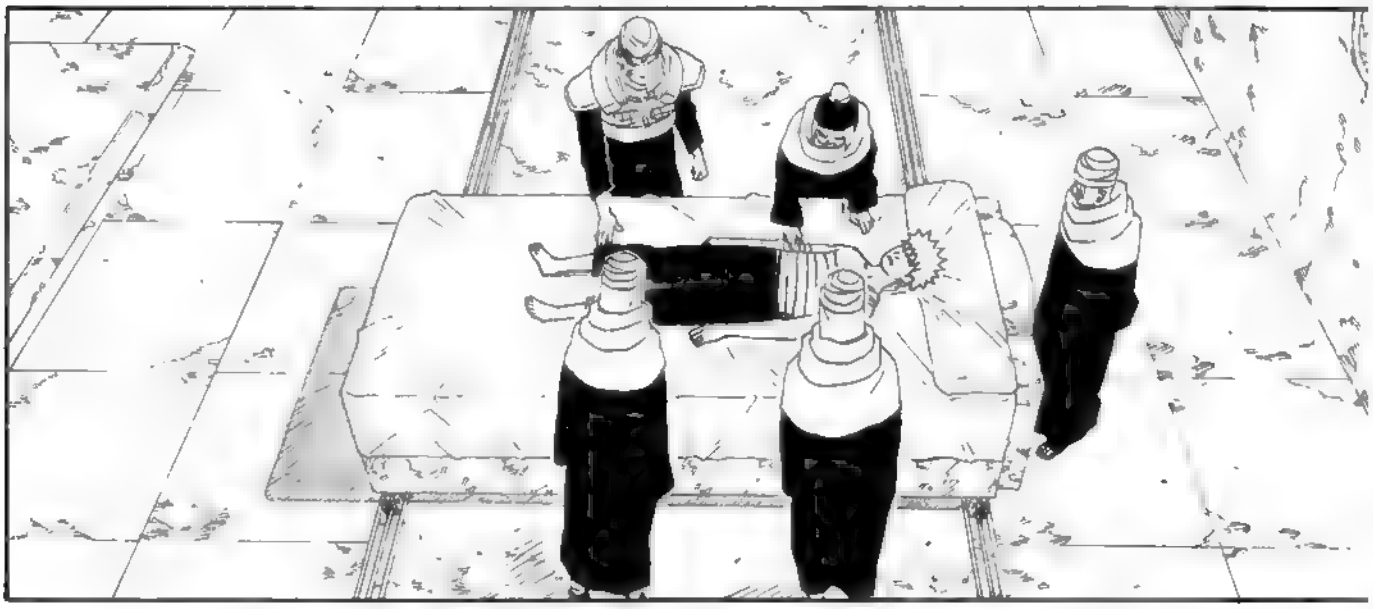
Number 253: Reinforcements...!!



NARUTO
-ナルト-

(Tsunade won the Lottery)





...
I AM AN EXPERT IN MOST POISONS... BUT THIS ONE'S BEYOND EVEN ME...
THAT SASORI... HE REALLY ADVANCED HIS SKILLS...
...SO WHAT NOW?

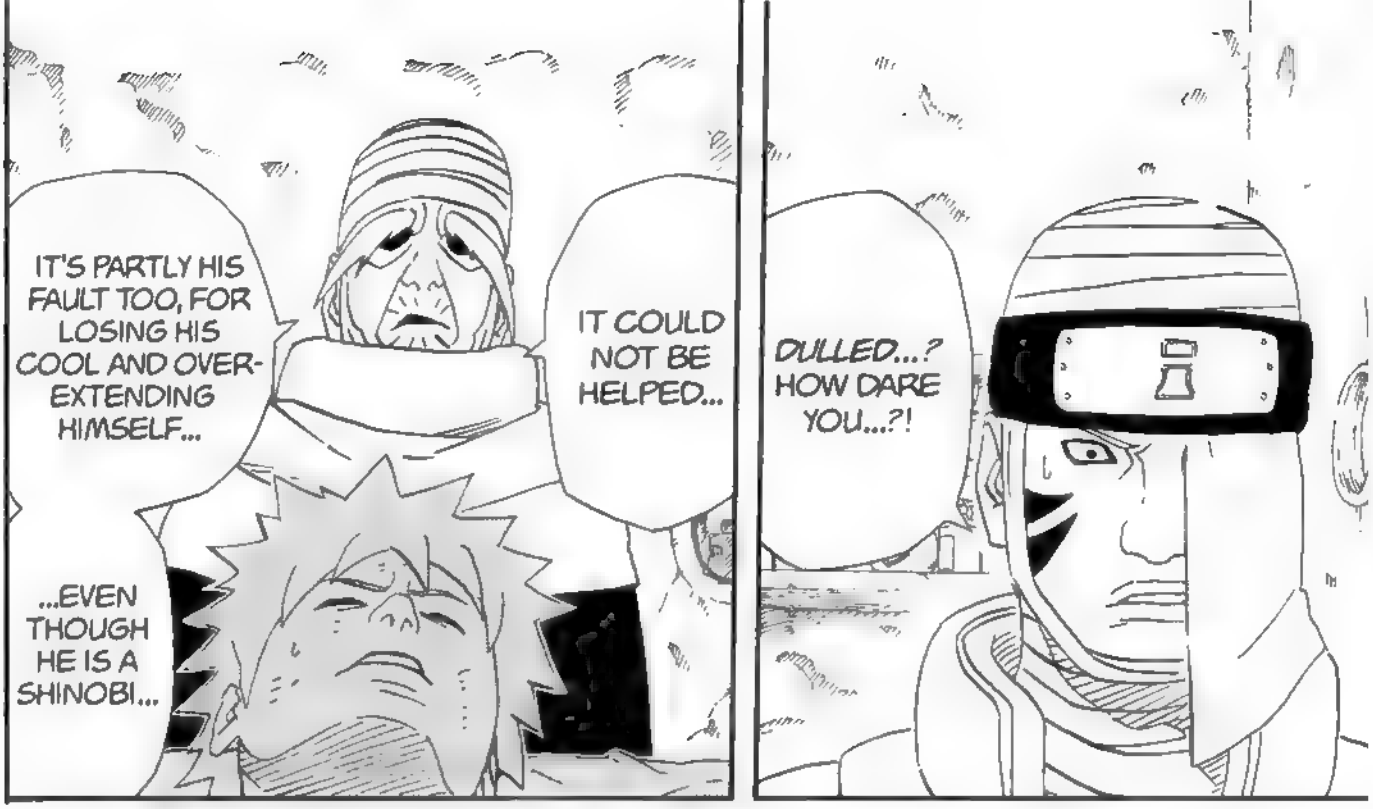
DURING THE GREAT WARS... SHE THOROUGHLY DECIPHERED ALL OF THE POISONS I HAD SYNTHESIZED...
...COMPOUNDED ANTIDOTES FOR THEM, AND MADE A FOOL OF ME.
WELL, THE ONLY ONE WHO'S MORE VERSED IN ANTIDOTES THAN I...
...IS PROBABLY THAT QUEEN OF SLUGS AND ELIXIRS, TSUNADE OF KONOHA.

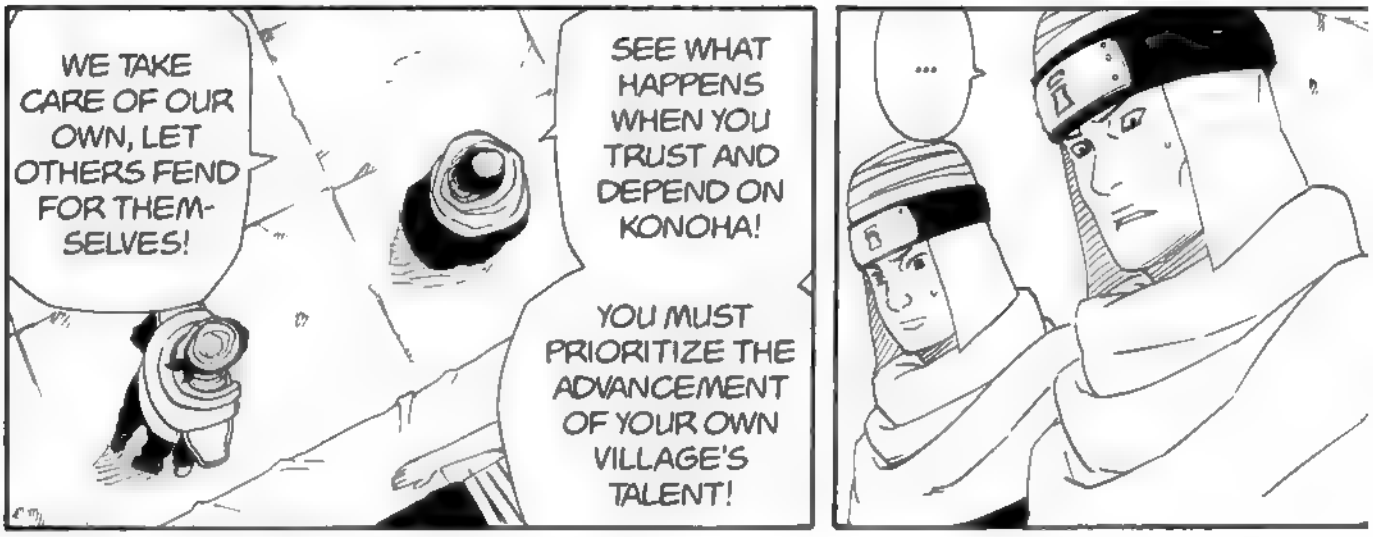
EVEN IF SHE COULD COME, IT TAKES THREE DAYS TO GET TO SUNAGAKURE FROM KONOHA.
...AND BY THEN...
YES, BUT... SHE IS HERSELF HOKAGE ...
...SO I DO NOT THINK SHE CAN LEAVE HER VILLAGE SO CASUALLY.

YOU'RE ALLIES WITH KONOHA RIGHT NOW, AREN'T YOU...?
YOU BETTER SUMMON HER RIGHT AWAY AND HAVE HER TAKE A LOOK.

YOUR SILLY INTERNATIONAL TREATIES HAVE DULLED YOUR EDGE...
...AND UNDERMINED ALL THAT WAS ONCE GREAT ABOUT THIS LAND!
...HUMPH. ALWAYS RELYING ON OTHERS ...!

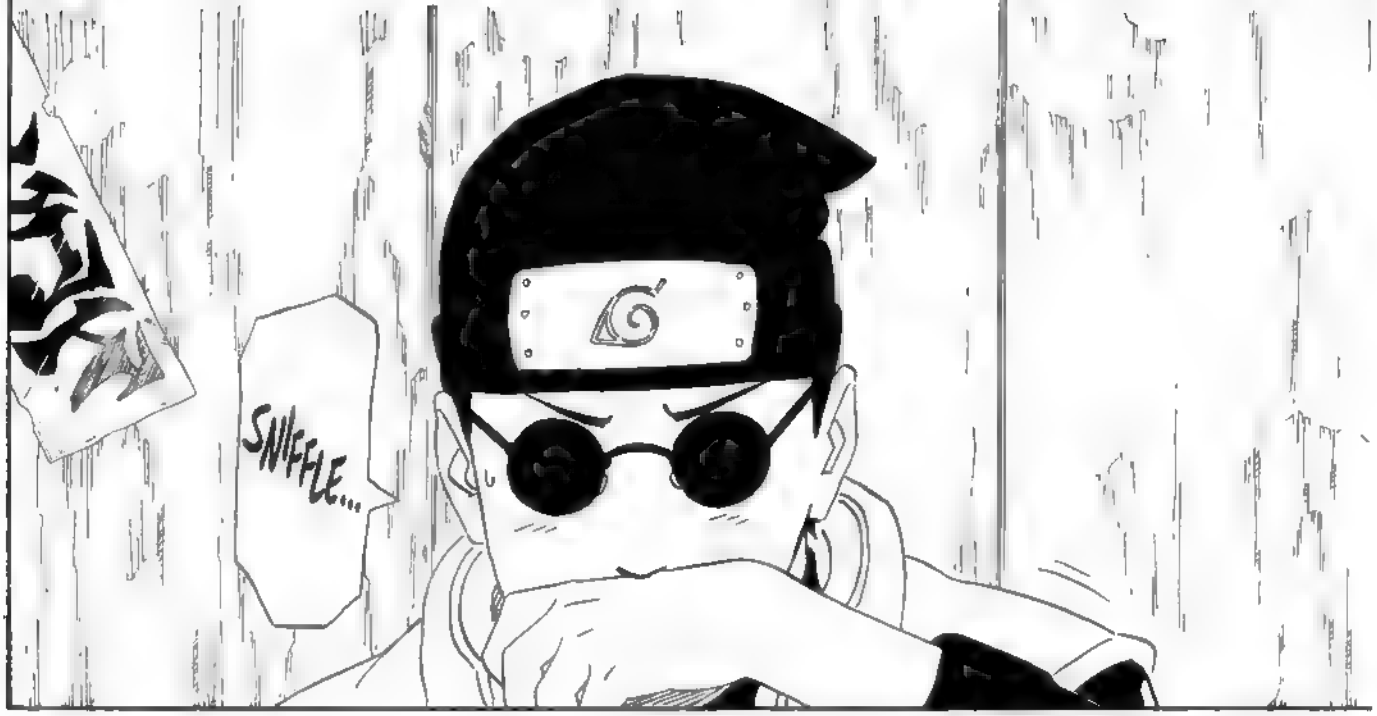
BESIDES, WE HAVE ALREADY REQUESTED KONOHA TO DISPATCH A SPECIALIST TEAM TO US.
ALL WE CAN DO NOW IS WAIT AND PRAY FOR THEIR TIMELY ARRIVAL...


IT'S PARTLY HIS FAULT TOO, FOR LOSING HIS COOL AND OVER-EXTENDING HIMSELF...
IT COULD NOT BE HELPED...
...EVEN THOUGH HE IS A SHINOBI...
DULLED...? HOW DARE YOU...?!


WE TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN, LET OTHERS FEND FOR THEM-SELVES!
SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TRUST AND DEPEND ON KONOHA!
YOU MUST PRIORITIZE THE ADVANCEMENT OF YOUR OWN VILLAGE'S TALENT!
...

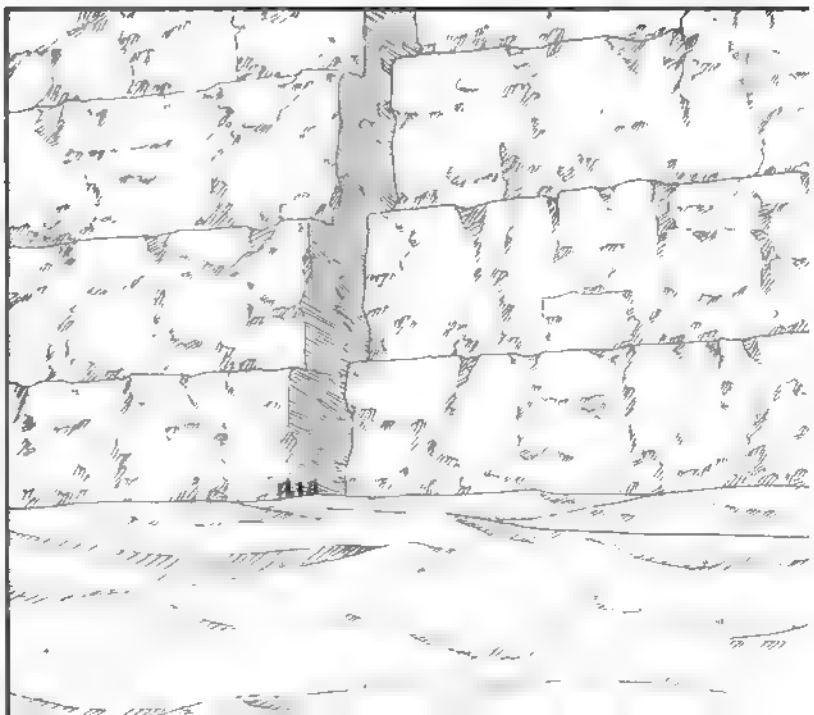
BESIDES...
...I HATE THAT SLUG LASS!
LISTEN... FRIENDLY ALLIANCES ARE FUNDAMENTALLY IMPOSSIBLE.
JUST YOU WATCH, THE MOST THEY'LL MANAGE TO SEND ARE SOME USELESS UNDERLINGS THAT ARE OUT OF FAVOR...

SNIFFLE...
ACHOO!
...ARE THEY STILL NOT READY?
YES...
BUT NEVER MIND ME. I WAS THINKING OF SENDING BACK-UP TROOPS TO THE SAND, BUT...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, LADY TSUNADE?
ACHOO!
IF YOU MEAN THEM... UM... ALMOST...

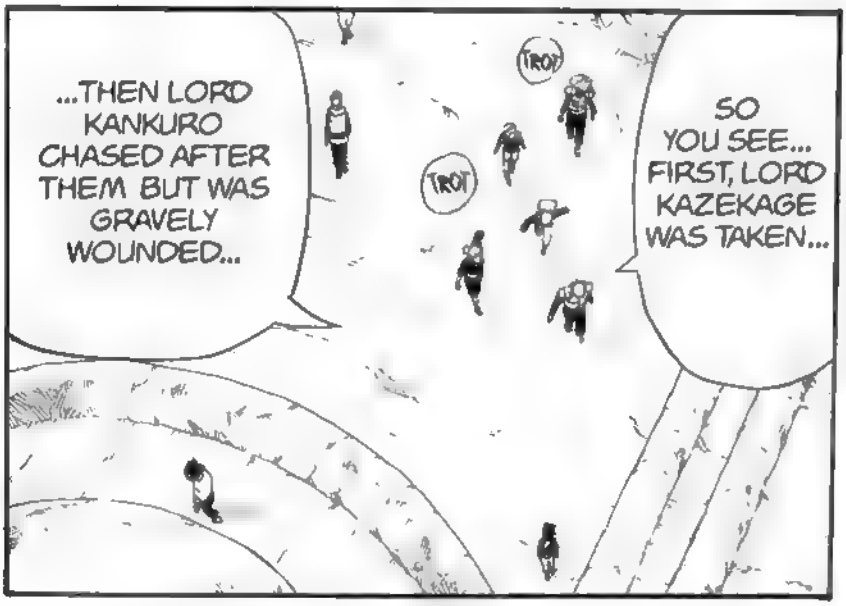

SNIFFLE...

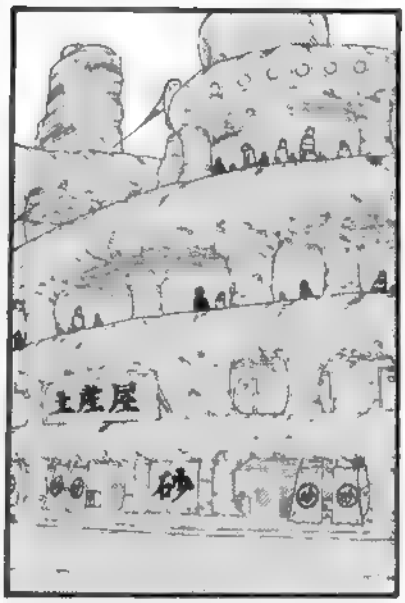
BUT THIS IS OUR FIRST MISSION AS OFFICIAL SHINOBI! I HOPE YOU DIDN'T CATCH COLD PEEPING!
WELL, I THINK I SOAKED IN THE HOT SPRING A LITTLE TOO LONG YESTERDAY.
MASTER EBISU, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
SUPER-PERV!

WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.
LADY TEMARI, YOU'RE HERE TOO...?
PLEASE, RIGHT THIS WAY!



OKAY!
HUF
HUF
HUF
HUF
HUF


...THEN LORD KANKURO CHASED AFTER THEM BUT WAS GRAVELY WOUNDED...
SO YOU SEE... FIRST, LORD KAZEKAGE WAS TAKEN...
TROT
TROT


土産屋
砂

THEY SAY HE ONLY HAS HALF A DAY LEFT...
YES, AND FURTHER-MORE, HE WAS POISONED...
...BUT WE CAN'T IDENTIFY IT FOR AN ANTIDOTE...

KANKURO, TOO?!
WHAT ?!

GRRR
...
!!

!
HURRY, TEMARI...
GAH...!
...
...

...I'LL EXAMINE HIM!

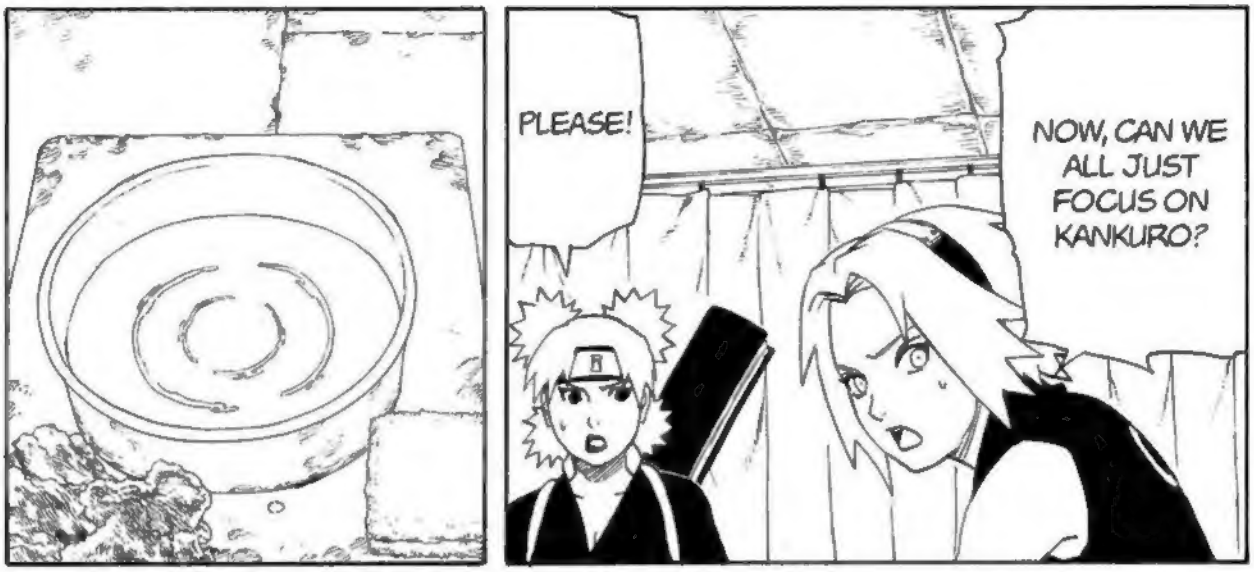
(Sign: Treatment Room 3)

KRAP
KRAP
TH
AP

READ THIS WAY
?!
?!
?!
?!
THIS OLD ONE... SHE'S GOOD!!
BOOF
WHY ARE YOU ATTACKING MASTER KAKASHI?!
YOU SHRIVELED-UP PRUNE!!
SCREECH

OH! NO, WAIT! I'M NOT...!
SILENCE!!
FINALLY, TODAY... I SHALL COLLECT VENGEANCE FOR MY SON!
THAT DAY, HOW DARE YOU...!
DESPICABLE WHITE FANG OF KONOHA...!

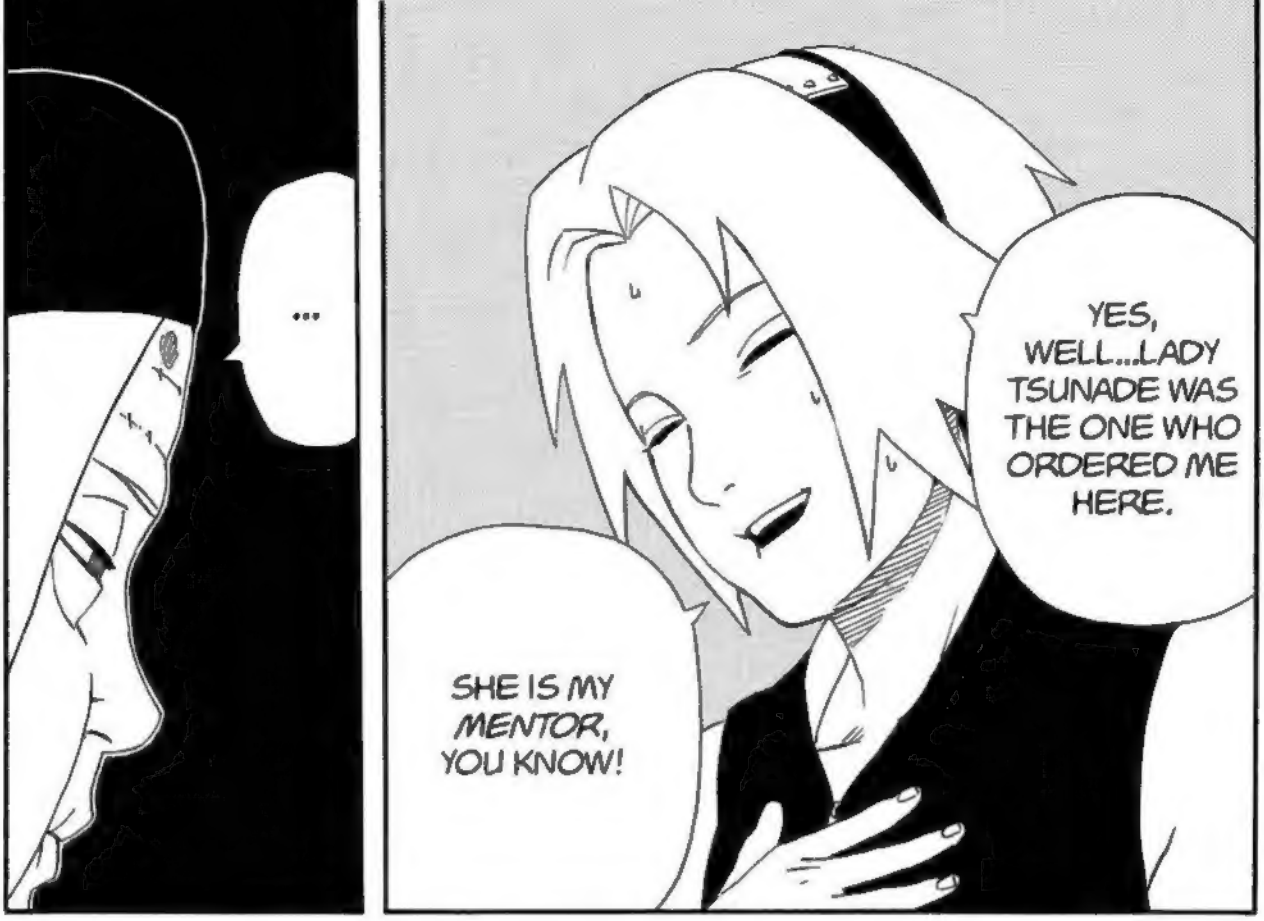
EH?
?!
BLOCK
!
HE LOOKS JUST LIKE HIM, BUT THAT'S NOT WHITE FANG.
LOOK CLOSELY, SIS...
...
PHEW...
...
OH. WELL... NEVER MIND... TEE HEE HEE!


PLEASE!
NOW, CAN WE ALL JUST FOCUS ON KANKURO?

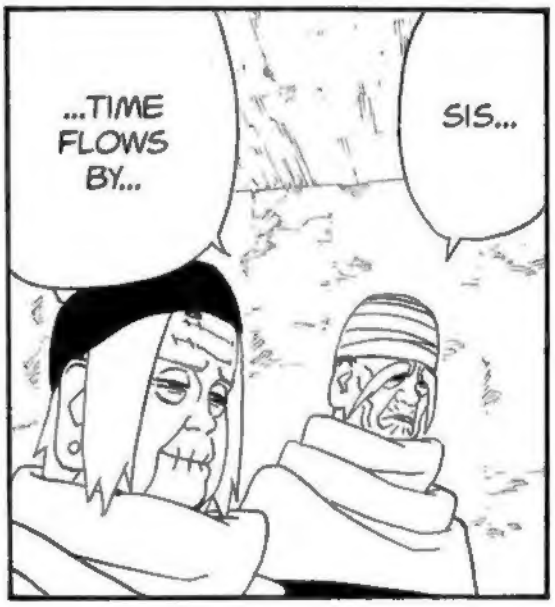
AK
BLOOP...

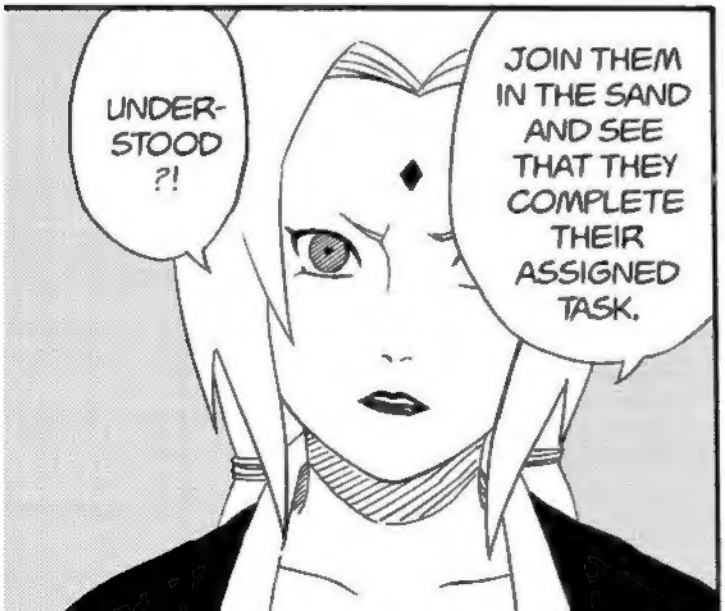
GOOD!
WAFT
WAFT
WHOSH...

PHEW...
SCHWUMP...
THUMP
I'VE REMOVED MOST OF THE POISON.
SO THERE'S NO MORE IMMEDIATE DANGER...
PHEW...
I STILL NEED TO NEUTRALIZE THE MINUTE QUANTITIES OF TOXINS REMAINING IN HIS SYSTEM.
...BUT WE'RE NOT COMPLETELY OUT OF THE WOODS JUST YET.
...I NEVER IMAGINED A GIRL LIKE YOU WOULD COME...
...YOU REMIND ME OF THAT SLUG LASS...
...YOU'RE AWE-SOME...!
SAKURA...
SO SOMEONE'S GOT TO RUN AND FETCH ME SOME MEDICAL SUPPLIES...
...


...
YES, WELL...LADY TSUNADE WAS THE ONE WHO ORDERED ME HERE.
SHE IS MY *MENTOR*, YOU KNOW!

WE GOTTA GO AFTER THE AKATSUKI **NOW!**
ALL RIGHT! BUT WE CAN'T REST TOO LONG!


...TIME FLOWS BY...
SIS...


UNDER-STOOD ?!
JOIN THEM IN THE SAND AND SEE THAT THEY COMPLETE THEIR ASSIGNED TASK.

...AN IDENTICAL MISSION AS TEAM KAKASHI.
I'M GIVING YOU...

 TO BE CONTINUED IN *NARUTO* VOLUME 29!!